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LETTERS & ARTS MORALS & MANNERS

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Our Pluralism

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Erratum

The credit line given for Dr. Molnar's review in the June issue ("Scholarly Smut," p. 8) was incorrect. Dr. Molnar is on the faculty at the City University of New York and a visiting professor of religious studies at Yale University.

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Renounce Yalta

Comment: Zawodny; Mason on Finder *(Red Carpet)*; Moser on Hayward *(Writers in Russia)*; Berman on Harrison *(The Enthusiast)*; Christensen on Arthur, d'Alpuget, Hospital *(Beyond the Mountain, Turtle Beach, The Ivory Swing)*; Kulish on Beichman, Bernstam, Solovyov, Klepikova *(Andropov, Yuri Andropov)*; Kopff on Arden *(Vox Pop)*; West on Wilcox, Williams *(Modern Baptists, Pariah and Other Stories)*; Commendables; In Focus; Perceptibles; Waste of Money; Screen; Music; Art; The American Proscenium; Journalism; A Prudent Progressive; Notables; Confluences; Liberal Culture.

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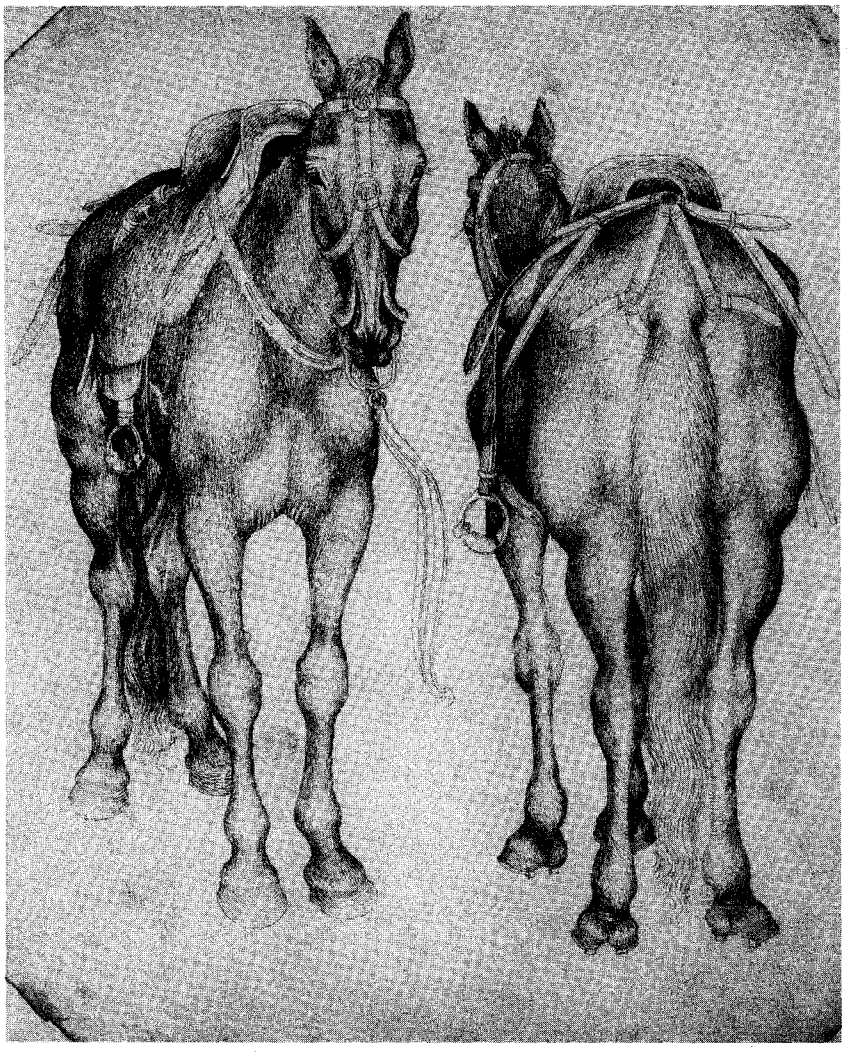
Our Pluralism



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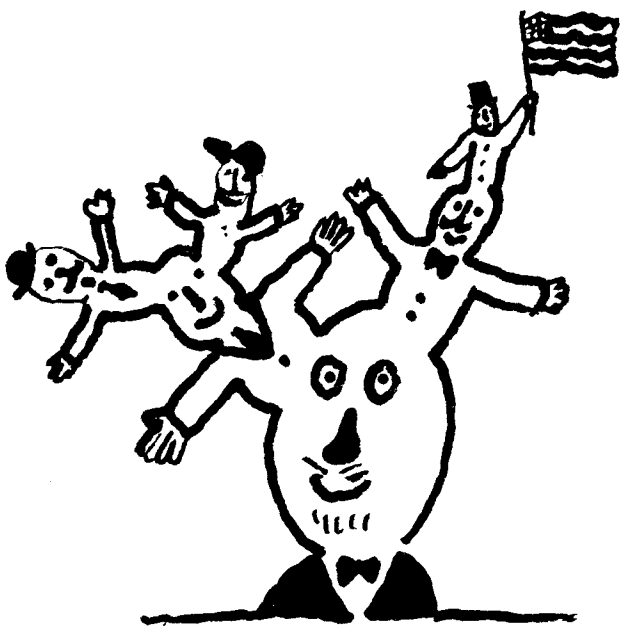
COMMENT

The Editorial Comment was presented as a speech by Dr. Carlson, Executive Vice-President of The Rockford Institute at the April 16, 1984 meeting of the Philadelphia Society.

Whole forests have been sacrificed in the last two years to the latest phase of this nation's perennial debate on education. Yet the debate swirling about us has yet to focus satisfactorily on the root problems besetting American public education. Unless a series of admittedly more esoteric and troublesome questions are examined—"What is the fundamental purpose of *public* education?" "What role should our schools play in shaping American culture and identity?" "What civilizational content should energize school curricula?"—the contemporary debate will accomplish little of duration.

In hopes of promoting this wider discussion, I will focus on what I call the "American pluralism problem." In an era where "cultural pluralism" is almost universally acknowledged as *the* defining metaphor of the American nation, it may seem tiresome to drag that old controversy out again. Yet I believe that one cannot understand the fundamental contradiction of the contemporary public education enterprise except by examining the history of our nation's pluralism problem.

Aristotle laid out the basic argument for public education. The constitution of a democratic republic, he argued, demanded an education in conformity with it, an instruction in "the republican spirit." It was, Aristotle said, "plain that the education of all must be one and the same, and that the



supervision of this education must be public and not private. . . . Public training is wanted in all things that are of public interest." Similarly, 19th-century architects of American public education saw a well-schooled citizenry and cultural unity as necessary to the success of the American republic. Looking at the widening diversity of social, ethnic, and religious groups coming into the U.S., they feared that value conflicts could rend the body politic, leaving the American republic helpless. For example, in an address to Ohio teachers in 1835, E. D. Mansfield stated: "It is altogether essential to our national security, strength and peace . . . that the foreigners who settle on our soil should cease to be Europeans and become [Anglo-] Americans. . . . We must become one nation."

So began the American crusade for public education. Over the next half-century, the struggle for national identity became intertwined with the common school movement. The goal was the inculcation of a common language and of common ideals, traditions, habits, and aspirations: in sum, indoctrination into a shared culture and national faith, one rooted in a diffused Anglo-Puritan ethos and beholden to a usually Protestant God. The McGuffey Readers best captured the moral order and social virtues which the public schools sought to instill. Ethnic parochialism was the enemy against which public school advocates struggled; the public school house with an American flag fluttering atop soon emerged among the most potent symbols of American nationhood.

The first "crisis of confidence" in the American public schools occurred during World War I, when a series of studies in New York City showed that what were then called the "new immigrants" from Southern and Eastern Europe were not being effectively assimilated. Responses to this apparent failure of the educational "melting pot" varied. Some, including the influential historian of education Ellwood P. Cubberley, worried that this wave of immigrants threatened "to corrupt our civic life." Cubberly wrote: "Our [educational] task is to break up these groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as a part of our American race, and to implant in their children . . . the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, law and order, and popular government."

New York University's Henry Pratt Fairchild maintained that efforts at "Americanization" in the public schools and elsewhere were not working simply because assimilation was extraordinarily difficult to achieve. "America is a spiritual reality," Fairchild wrote, "a whole complex of cultural and moral values" which could be absorbed only after decades of contact, not simply through the schools. Restrictions on immigration, he concluded, were the only answer.

A third response emerged in the work of Horace Kallen, professor of philosophy at the New School for Social Research. Kallen argued that the assimilation process *should* have failed for it was opposed to both democracy and true cultural growth. A committed cultural pluralist, Kallen dismissed the fears and vanity of "native Americans," whom he labeled "scared lodgers at home." The cultural geography of the United States, he insisted, showed the existence of many unique

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cultural groups and very little evidence of homogenization. Indeed, the American immigrant experience actually seemed to *sharpen* ethnic loyalties. Denying any "public" purpose to education, Kallen argued that "the actualities of human life are first and last human individuals." Referring to public education, he concluded: "If indoctrination is inescapable . . . it had best be an indoctrination in the relativity and contingency of all doctrines, in their dependence on choice and experience."

Yet the celebration of American pluralism was interrupted during the late 1940's and through the 50's, as the American people seemed to be forging their own distinct identity. The crucibles of this American style were the burgeoning postwar suburbs: new kinds of communities beyond the immigrant experience. Under the influence of suburban life, ethnic differences waned while adherence to middle-class norms spread. Hyphenated-Americans of many—but not all—stripes poured into the developing communities, voluntarily suppressed their distinctions, and sought fulfillment in their immediate families, their growing churches, and in their new neighborhoods. The process represented more than mindless conformity.

By the mid-1950's, intellectuals acknowledged the change. Conservative sociologist Carle Zimmerman, for example, noted with pleasure that, "in answer to the 'challenge' of world leadership," American culture was "homogenizing" and "creating a new and much stronger family system." Liberal economist and historian Walt Rostow cast Americans as "a suburbanizing nation" with "an increased social and political homogeneity."

Public education also recovered its confidence during this period. Referring to the mission of the schools, University of Chicago President Robert Maynard Hutchins wrote: "The community rests on the social nature of man. It requires communication among its members. . . . And their philosophy . . . must supply them with a common purpose and a common concept of man and society adequate to hold the community together." On a more prosaic level, the "suburban, middle class" America of the 1950's found its moral equivalent of the McGuffey Readers in the "Dick and Jane" series, books that taught "the American way of life" now seen as rooted in the suburban environment.

Then came the time of troubles. Critics, well-meaning and otherwise, charged that the suburban vision of America was incomplete, that it was merely the product of the unique demographics of the post-World War II era, a system undergirded by transient fashions, one without sustaining roots. While I believe that this vision of America was more than an illusion and that it exhibited both moral purpose and an internal logic, it is true that it fell with surprising rapidity. Undoubtedly, the modern civil rights movement was one source of disequilibrium. What began as an overdue and correct effort to claim a place for black Americans in this new suburban dream became an assault on that vision and resulted in new claims for racial separateness. Malcolm X's declaration

"I don't even consider myself an American" helped to shatter the vision. Similarly, Nathan Glazer's and Daniel Moynihan's 1963 *Beyond the Melting Pot* represented a second "rediscovery" of ethnicity in America and implied the tentativeness of the American identity. In 1965, Congress fundamentally altered the immigration law so that growing numbers of Asians and Latin Americans found their way to this land.

America was again changing, but this time there were no significant voices arguing for "Americanization"—few even

(continued on page 27)

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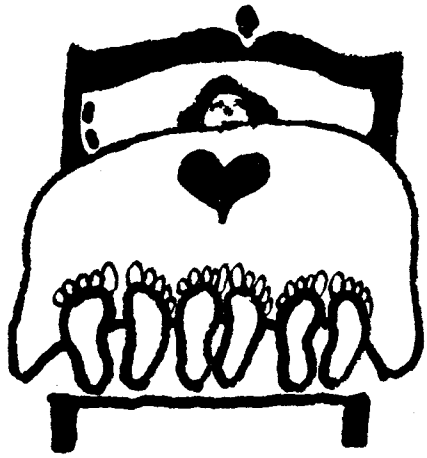
Americans, Operatives & Apparatchiks

Rael Jean Isaac and Erich Isaac: *The Coercive Utopians: Social Deception by America's Power Players;* Regnery Gateway; Chicago.

by Samuel T. Francis

For about the past 15 years it has gradually been dawning on an increasing number of Americans that the people who rule their country are not entirely under their control. Bureaucracies enforce regulations no legislature ever passed; legislatures enact laws no voter ever wanted; judges pronounce decisions foreign to law and conscience; and the mass media express opinions no one else ever thought. Although Rael Jean and Erich Isaac do not explicitly seek to account for this phenomenon, their book does provide at least a partial explanation of it. In the last generation certain key positions in the national elite have been unduly and rather cryptically influenced or captured by elements of an alien and hostile ideological faction. This movement of "coercive utopians" harbors a profound hatred for the American social system and for the mainstream of American life; because it has been able, by force and fraud, to insinuate itself into positions of power, it has imposed several of its bizarre ideas on the American people without asking or even wanting their consent.

The Coercive Utopians is a comprehensive, methodical, and carefully documented study of the activities, political and cultural influence, funding, and interconnections of the assorted operatives who compose the American left. The Isaacs' book is not only the most comprehensive but also undoubtedly the best of such studies, for it shows no sign of the characteristic faults of the genre. The authors resist the tendencies to fall into exhoration, to indulge in speculation or conspiracy theories as a substitute for research and careful thought, and to serve up ideological sermons. The Isaacs' style is readable, the complexity and outright deviousness of their subject notwithstanding, and remarkably free of rhetoric, given their evident distaste for leftist dogmas and pretensions. Their book contains a massive amount of information on the currently active left-wing groups and personalities in the United States, and it is indispensable for those who want to understand the background, strategies, and organizational linkages of people and groups including Ralph Nader, the



Institute for Policy Studies and its satellites, the National Council of Churches, the environmentalist and anticorporate movements, and the anti-defense and nuclear-freeze campaigns.

Nor do the Isaacs indulge in the current fad of finding spies and terrorists behind every left-wing rally. It is true that the reader who is looking for terrorist cells sprouting from behind progressive facades or for KGB agents manipulating mass movements will not be disappointed. The Isaacs document how "the FBI uncovered a Puerto Rican FALN cell operating out of the Episcopal Church's National Commission on Hispanic Affairs" in 1976; how the *New York Times,* the *Wall Street Journal,* and the *Washington Post* uncritically and (presumably) unwittingly accepted Soviet and Cuban influenced forgeries and disinformation; and how members of the World Peace Council, the U.S. Peace Council, and the Communist Party as well as Soviet intelligence officers influenced and manipulated the nuclear freeze movement.

Conspiracy and intrigue are not the Isaacs' point, however. Their main purpose, aside from their morphology of the left, is to show the fundamental vapidity and dangerousness of what today passes for progressivism. The adherents of the left, they argue, are utopian because:

> they assume that man is perfectible and the evils that exist are the product of a corrupt social system. They believe that an ideal social order can be created in which man's potentialities can flower freely. They are 'coercive' because in their zeal for attaining an ideal order they seek to impose their blueprints in ways that go beyond legitimate persuasion.

The utopians "are forced to a devil theory to explain the gap between the desired and the real." If men can be perfected, the left must offer an explanation of existing imperfections, and the most convenient explanation lies in the machinations of a powerful and malicious enemy. The corporations and the military-industrial complex become the handiest villains, but the ultimate foe is the American way of life itself and its values and institutions—its religion and morality, family structure, manners and hierarchies, work ethic, patriotism, and its complete lack of interest in utopian idols and crusades. The Isaacs concentrate principally on the left's attack on economic, national security, and policy-making institutions, but they could also have added equally chilling chapters on utopian activities in areas including sex education, curriculum reform, homosexual promotion, feminism, children's

Dr. Francis is the author of Power and History: The Political Thought of James Burnham *(University Press of America).*

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rights, and other engagements on what Rudi Dutschke called "the long march through the institutions." Aside from the merits of these issues, they represent the utopian goal in its ultimate and most alarming form: not merely a radical transformation of the structure of power and the distribution of wealth in America, but also the destruction of the social and moral fabric of wealth and power mandated by popular will and democratic principle. The tactics by which the left pursues this goal parallel and were probably influenced by those of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who, as the Isaacs point out, "urged the need for 'building a new collective consciousness by attacking, through ideological-cultural struggle and political action, all of the "intellectual moral" foundations of bourgeois society.'" It is in this sense, then, that the Isaacs' title for their chapter on the utopian think-tanks, where progressivist brainstorms typically originate, is, appropriately, "America the Enemy."

Yet the very establishment that the left challenges and threatens shares to no small degree many of the ideological premises of the left. The Isaacs show how certain large corporations and foundations have financed a number of utopian projects. Public relations, ignorance, guilt, and fear of blackmail may account for this funding of hostile forces, but it is also possible that the managers of the giant corporations and foundations feel at least some sympathy for and identity with the enemies of middle America (especially when corporate interests are not immediately threatened). Certainly such sympathy is evident among the left-leaning clergymen and government bureaucrats of the establishment who also provide institutional funding for the utopians.

What the Isaacs do not articulate fully is that the American establishment operates on liberal premises and uses the liberal ideology of the New Deal-Great Society era as a political formula to justify its own power. There is only a difference of degree between liberal ideology and the utopianism of the contemporary left, and the left is constantly accusing liberals of "not going far enough" in their reforms, of being hypocritical in their commitment to liberal values, and of having been bought off by the right, by their own positions in the establishment, and by inertia and cowardice. Of course, the left is generally correct in this perception. The liberal establishment understands that it cannot fully implement the ideals and values of liberalism and continue to survive while the utopians do not understand this (which is why they are utopian). Aside from these differences, however, the coercive utopians are not really as hostile to and distant from the American establishment as they want to believe, and the establishment itself nurtures the seeds of utopian ideology and policies. Increasingly since the 1930's the American establishment—in both the private as well as the public sectors (e.g., in the academy, church, and media)—has gravitated toward a world view that permits or demands collective social engineering by state or corporation, the abandonment of legal and moral norms for technocratic and materialistic goals, the appeasement of world communism, a universalist rather than a nationalist foreign policy, and a cultural pluralism that is "open" to all things on the left but to none on the right. This world view is shared by such superficially disparate figures as Andrew Young, John Lindsay, and Richard Barnet of the Institute for Policy Studies, and the congruence of the world views of the left and the establishment is the basic reason why the latter has so warmly received coercive utopians from the time of Lincoln Steffens and Alger Hiss to our own days of Orlando Letelier and Philip Agee.

The American establishment, then, is at best a weak reed in resisting the utopian challenge and indeed often collaborates with it and promotes it. It is noteworthy that the Isaacs' heroes are not corporate officers who have in-

Notables

Tenderhearted—and Headed

She is frail. The Avedon on the dust jacket shows a blond Shelley Duvall with a touch of anorexia. Is that important? Possibly. Just as a person wouldn't be likely to say to an anorexigenic personality, "How's it going—*chubby?*" it would be hard to say to Renata Adler, after looking into those eyes of a pained doe, "Why don't you look for a new line of work—like waiting tables in an all-night joint?" Negative announcements about her work are hard to come by. *Speedboat*, her penultimate book (for now, anyway), evoked the designation "an amazing writer of fiction" from Updike; John Leonard trotted out bizarre comparisons to Camus and others. And there were more, many more. Adler must have read these reviews and taken them to heart. Possibly to soul—but then religious metaphors are passé, aren't they?

Pitch Dark, (Alfred A. Knopf; New York) is one of the most pretentious books ever to be published (don't look for that blurb on the paperback edition), which is an amazing feat, given that it is a stylishly slim 144 pages. Adler apparently believes that there is something profound about her elliptically rendered tale of a mistress given the boot . . . or was she? With all of the attendant nonsense, it's hard to say for certain. One thing is a sure thing, however: she babbles, yes, that's the word, *babbles*. About whatever occurs to her, which isn't the same as saying "About whatever comes to mind," for that brings thinking into the discussion. Once she makes a statement, she tends to say it again a few pages on. And often another time or two for good measure. At one point (and then at several others) she writes, "This is the age of crime." It certainly is. *Pitch Dark* is one of the proofs. □

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trepidly met the utopian threat or intellectuals and academics who have gutted ideology, but rather a few, somewhat plain individuals whose personal commitments and prodigious efforts have repeatedly exposed or resisted leftist frauds and intimidation—Reed Irvine of *Accuracy in Media,* John and Louis Rees of the *Information Digest,* and Petr Beckmann of *Access to Energy.* These figures—not the leaders of corporations, main-line churches, prestigious universities, or large newspapers and periodicals—who work out of their homes and basements with mimeograph machines and packed filing cabinets are the Americans who have provided the real "guerrilla politics" of our time and of whom no one will ever read in the Style Section of the *Washington Post.* The defenders of America are therefore not part of the establishment and indeed are excluded from it and resented by it.

In their concluding chapters the Isaacs have recourse to the idea of the "New Class"—"those who produce and distribute knowledge rather than material goods" and whose numbers and social importance have been increasing rapidly since the end of World War II—to explain the movement they are analyzing. "The coercive utopians," the authors explain, "serve as the vanguard of the New Class."

Yet, if it is true that the national establishment, or elite, shares basic elements of the world view of the left, then it is not clear how "new" the New Class is. It is more probable that the utopian movement in the U.S. is primarily an ideological rather than a sociological formation and that its social identity is essentially the same as that of the establishment that bred it. In the 1960's the offspring of the establishment discovered that their parents' liberal values were not being fully adhered to and that, through the same techniques of mass organization and propaganda on which the establishment rests, they could apparently advance the realization of those values. The coercive utopians of the 1970's and 80's are the New Left of the 1960's, but for all their pretensions to revolution and change, they have never renounced their faith in fundamental establishment ideology. They have merely made the callow mistake of taking the ideology too seriously.

Despite their pretensions and their offensiveness, the coercive utopians are not likely to go away. As the Isaacs emphasize, "they have an excellent understanding of the mechanisms of power and how to obtain it and are well versed in the tactics of political pressure." Lodged in their tax-exempt think-tanks, with access to the national media, with a foothold in the Federal bureaucracy, the churches, universities, foundations, and increasingly in corporations and unions, the utopians can anticipate a bright future for themselves. The Isaacs show how successfully they penetrated the Carter Administration and how, either from within the bureaucracy or from outside the government, they have derailed a number of the policies and commitments of the Reagan Administration: they have made the debate on defense center on a nuclear freeze and deployment of the missiles in Europe rather than on the Soviet arms buildup; they have made aid to El Salvador center on human rights rather than on communist aggression and terrorism; they have stopped significant changes in environmental laws and policies, forced out Anne Gorsuch at the Environmental Protection Agency, and prevented the abolition of the Legal Services Corporation; and they have been instrumental in halting the revival and development of nuclear energy technology. As the utopians continue to flourish, it is unlikely that they will be attenuated as they come to grapple with the real problems of government. It is more probable that the utopian movement will continue to infiltrate and manipulate the national government and American society, and perhaps someday their offspring will revolt against them and eventually replace them in positions of power. If so, and if books are still written then, perhaps someone will anatomize that revolt as ably as the Isaacs have done in *The Coercive Utopians.* □

Pragmatic Problems

Jacques Barzun: *A Stroll With William James;* Harper & Row; New York.

by Thomas Fleming

William James is the nearest thing to a thoroughly American philosopher this nation has produced. George Santayana complained that James felt compelled to play the part of a home-spun American—a role enjoyed by our intellectuals from Ben Franklin to Ezra Pound. Santayana found the compulsion to be American difficult to understand, but Santayana was a Spaniard. Being Spanish—or Italian or Irish, for that matter—is an unambiguous identity. It is as much a fact of life as being a woman. But America is different. To be an American is more like being a man, in that no one is quite sure what either means, just that it is important to play the part. However, some find the burden of being an American too heavy to bear. William's brother Henry, like T. S. Eliot, turned into an Englishman—or at least a caricature of one.

As Jacques Barzun makes clear in his *Stroll,* William and Henry were much closer in spirit than most critics have been willing to admit. Both spent much of their earlier life rambling, first with their eccentric father, later on their own. Nearly half of William's first 25 years were spent out of the country. It is not inconceivable that his Americanism came no easier to him than English manners did to Henry. Neither attitude was, precisely speaking, affected, but neither was quite real. A philosopher's background may have little to do with his work—

Dr. Fleming is editor of The Southerner.

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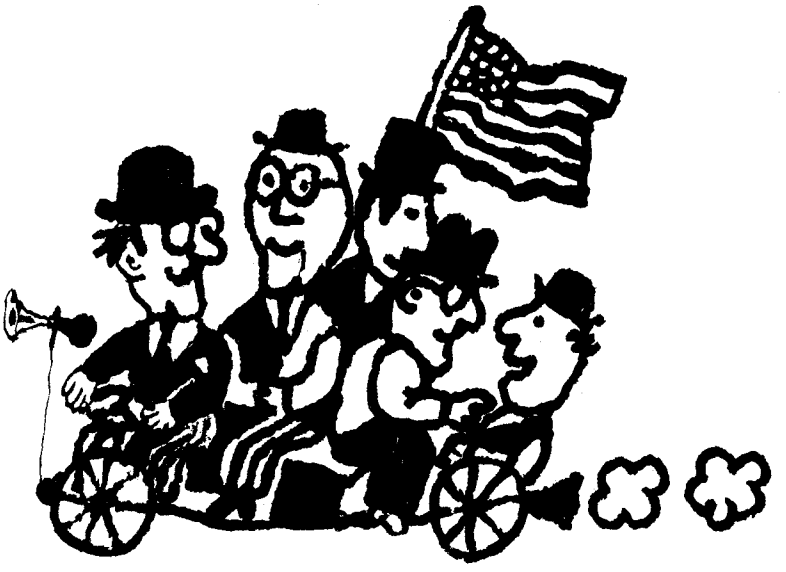
such is arguably the case with St. Thomas or David Hume—but James's thought was a very personal affair: it is something like the sum of all forces at work upon James throughout his life—the burgeoning technical revolution, the Victorian ideas of progress and social responsibility, the equally Victorian loss (or rejection) of faith, and the obsession with Art so characteristic of the fin de siècle. If anyone can weave these separate threads together into the fabric of a philosopher's mind, it is Jacques Barzun.

Barzun, despite his foreign birth, is a splendid example of what the American liberal temper can accomplish: a literate, intelligent, and thoroughly decent defense of all that seems likely to improve our "American way of life." In a long and useful career, he has expounded with patience and eloquence the shortcomings of our intellectual institutions, the glories of romantic genius, and the implications of the scientific revolution which continues to haunt our dreams. In this his most recent book, Barzun returns to one of the main sources of his inspiration, the philosophy of William James. While professing eclecticism, Barzun concedes James a special place in his affections. Barzun explores James the man, his times, and the broad outlines of what can fairly be called his system—psychology, ethics, and epistemology.

Most of James's philosophy is summed up in that deadly word "pragmatism," a term he coined in a lecture delivered at Berkeley in 1898. James's pragmatism is not an isolated fragment of philosophizing. It is an integral part—the centerpiece—of his system and the link between his psychology and his ethics. His *Principles of Psychology* (1890) remains an important work, if only for the dogged persistence with which he distinguishes between mind and brain. Jamesian psychology owes a great deal to Bishop Berkeley: both men concentrated on what happens in the mind as the only given of experience. This attention to mind led James to formulate his "stream of consciousness." Within this stream, nothing can be taken as a fixed rule. Concepts like "white" and "black" are only (sometimes) helpful abstractions. James offers no "realm of the abstract" as a refuge to "persons who yearn for security and perfection here below." Given such a psychology, it becomes imperative to devise a means of verification—some way of making and determining true statements.



Pragmatism is James's solution. Strictly construed, it is "an attempt to explain how the mind ascertains truth." Ideas are true "insofar as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience," that is, if they lead to productive results. James's most famous definition—"truth is what works"—is not the ethics of Jay Gould or even Calvin Coolidge, but a summary of the process of verification. The difficulty with pragmatism is not that it is a justification for Yankee shrewdness, but that it justifies or verifies a material cause only by reference to a material event. A theory about the material universe is true, he argues, only if it leads to productive consequences in that same universe. What is left out, *ex hypothesi,* is any attempt to anchor truth in something beyond nature—what C. S. Lewis called "supernature." In practice, this method of verification only removes the problem of truth from the object to the subject. If truth is only what works, then we are still left with the problem of defining "works" in a way that avoids absolute relativism. James's solution is reminiscent of Protagoras, who declared man to be the measure of all things. Like James, Protagoras was necessarily an agnostic, and also like James, he took refuge in vague aspirations toward decent behavior and a consensus of right-thinking man.

Barzun encourages us not to be alarmed by James's relativism and urges upon us the usual cultural relativism made familiar by the disciples of Franz Boas. Since Moslems have four wives and African chiefs 40, "it seems egotistical to proclaim any one set of commandments the sole morality and somewhat fanciful to speak of 'indelible moral truths implanted in the human heart.'" This is worse than poor reasoning: it is poor anthropology. Moral ideals are not an ethnographical statement of how people do behave, but of how they ought to behave. It is, after all, more than a little

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odd that the Ten Commandments prohibit just about everything New Yorkers consider essential to the good life. The fact that certain cultures have different standards from ours does not necessarily vitiate an ethical system whose essentials can be found in Aristotle, Confucius, and the Old Testament. Some of the developing peoples have different systems of science and mathematics. Are cannibalism and sorcery to be considered the equivalent of Christian ethics and Newton's laws? Besides, many of our most basic prohibitions—against incest, adultery, theft, and murder—can be regarded as universal or, at least, convergent evolutionary norms. It is a superficial and somewhat snobbish cultural relativism that refuses to comprehend the parallels between our own ethical norms and those of the most primitive societies.

Barzun takes his argument a step further and insists that antirelativists "need to see that without the acceptance of different ethical norms we should never have got away from those of the caveman." It is difficult to see why the moral relativist should look down his nose at paleolithic ethics. It is equally difficult to see by what presumed right a relativist can insist that anybody "needs" to do anything. James's variety of gentle skepticism was comparatively harmless in the hands of scrupulous nonbelievers like Hume, Huxley, or James himself, but it will not do as the ethical foundation of a civil order. Most people, not even intellectuals, are deterred from vice by the consideration that it isn't quite nice or that it may be harmful. Even Henry Adams, James's colleague, was closer to reality in his inchoate adoration of the Virgin and the Dynamo. The absolute imperatives from which pragmatists shrink may prove to be the only security we have. In the long run, it is the personal test that counts.

James did suggest two possible sources for a positive morality, or two main commandments. The first is "that we should seek incessantly . . . so as to act as to bring about the very largest total universe of good that we can see." In such a search, abstract rules can serve as helpful guidelines, but since "every dilemma is . . . a unique situation," moral progress depends on our attention. We must always keep in mind the tangible results of our actions. The second great commandment has to do with obligations which, James asserts, arise from every personal claim made upon us: "There is some obligation whenever there is a claim. It is incumbent upon each of us, whenever a claim is made, either to accept or reject the obligation." Barzun believes that James's second commandment can give us a "release from interminable shilly-shallying." It removes moral decisions from the realm of personal likes and dislikes, since we are to consider the claims made by anyone, without respect of persons.

Unfortunately, James's second commandment—like all of his ethics—begs more questions than it answers. Why should we, adrift in the stream of our private conscious experience, consider even for a moment the claims made by "the others"? Besides, it is not always possible for some of us to consider our possible obligations to every person who knocks on the door. Artists, surgeons, and monks all need at least some time to be free of the incessant demands of other people, and even those of us not engaged in critical occupations cannot necessarily spend our lives in entertaining alternatives. Much of our character, much of what is most essentially us, depends on what we have rejected. No one can expect Elie Wiesel, for example, to consider the possible claims upon his humanity which might be made by retired concentration camp guards any more than a hard-shell Southern Baptist can be required to give a fair hearing to Larry Flynt. In both cases, granting enemies the right to make a claim not only gives ground on the battlefield: it weakens the integrity of their personal identify. It will be remembered that Jesus did pause to consider the case for the other side. But that was at the beginning of his ministry. Afterwards, what conceivable purpose would it have served to give the tempter a hearing?

Far from providing a basis for action, James's moral principles condemn his followers to lives of liberal indecision. He seems to have conceived of his two principles as replacements for the two great commandments, but how weak and indecisive they appear, when set beside the biblical "thou shalt . . . ." The scriptural commandments come from a source claiming absolute authority, James's from a well-intentioned and cultivated professor of psychology.

In the end, all of James's speculations come to grief on the same rock—invisible, but palpable as the force of a hurricane. James regarded all manifestations of the religious spirit as phenomena to be studied—an acceptable procedure if, and only if, he happened to be right. However, his own agnosticism and naive insistence on the concrete facts of personal experience may strike many readers as a typical late Victorian phenomenon. In poetry, fin-de-siècle introspection bore fruit in the decadent music of Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, but in philosophy the results are less obviously positive. The cynical mysticism of Henry Adams and the tawdry utilitarianism of John Dewey have this in common with pragmatism: each is built on the shifting sands of the individual stream of consciousness. It is better, in the end, to be a thorough-going Berkeleyan and take your stand on "esse est percipi." Such metaphysical rigor can lead to positive consequences.

What are we to make of Barzun's curious book? It is an easy way to get acquainted with William James; it is the best sort of literary history: part scholarship, part personal record of Barzun's lifelong dialogue with James. It is the sort of book that no longer gets written. Indeed, it could only be written by that nearly extinct type of person: the man of letters. Barzun reminds us what college professors used to be like, before they became bureaucrats. □

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The Remnants of Realism

Philip Roth: *The Anatomy Lesson;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

Louis Auchincloss: *Exit Lady Masham;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

by Mark Royden Winchell

In the opinion of Tom Wolfe, "the introduction of realism into literature... was like the introduction of electricity into machine technology. It was *not* just another device. It raised the state of the art to a new magnitude." If Wolfe is correct, then what we have witnessed in recent American fiction is nothing less than a power shortage. The hegemony which realism enjoyed from the time of Mark Twain and William Dean Howells until just after the Second World War has come under assault from a younger generation of writers ("fictionists" as they prefer to call themselves) who find their models in the neo-fabulism of Beckett, Pinter, Kafka, Hesse, and Marquez. Wolfe attributes the rise of neo-fabulism in American fiction to the fact that almost all "serious" writers of the post-war generation are university educated. Divorced from the broad range of experience outside the academy, the younger novelists base their writing not on life but on books. What results are "fictions" which hold a mirror not to nature but to themselves. There can be little question that what Gore Vidal refers to as "American plastic" (which is more commonly known as "post-modernism") has become the dominant narrative mode in graduate programs in creative writing. At the same time, novelists laboring in the old realist tradition are increasingly prone to repetition and self-parody.

Although the decline of realism coincided with the rise of post-modernism, there is probably no direct causal link between the two phenomena. Instead, because the nature of the reading audience itself has changed in the post-war years, realistic fiction is no longer able to serve the same needs that it once did. Historically, the novel was a bourgeois art form which came into being with the rise of the middle class and flourished as a mimetic representation of social reality. In our own time, however, the documentary function of narrative fiction has been largely taken over by films, television, and feature journalism. To the extent that there is still a market for fiction among the middle class, it is demanding not social realism but fantasy—spy thrillers, horror stories, Harlequin romances, and various forms of pornography.

Without the adulation of either the reading public or the literary tastemakers, talented young storytellers have little incentive to write realistic novels. Consequently, the most prominent practitioners of realism are those writers who have been around for years. The tendency toward repetition and self-parody, then, is at least in part the natural consequence of literary attrition: as they get older, novelists who write from experience and observation often run into difficulty finding new and arresting material. We encounter very different responses to this dilemma in Philip Roth's *The Anatomy Lesson* and Louis Auchincloss's *Exit Lady Masham.*

Since the publication of *Goodbye Columbus* in 1959, Roth has created our image of the Jewish family in transition. As Robert Penn Warren has noted, the emergence of an identifiably Jewish fiction in the decades after World War II parallels the renaissance in Southern literature a generation earlier. In both cases, a traditional and insular subculture was being assimilated into the mainstream of American life. Such an experience often produces the sort of interpersonal conflict and elegiac self-consciousness upon which literature thrives. Unfortunately for the ethnic novelist, the agony of assimilation does not go on indefinitely. After a certain point, both Blanche DuBois and Sophie Portnoy become not so much anachronisms as clichés.

The Anatomy Lesson is an intriguingly self-referential novel which deals in part with the mid-life crisis of a notorious Jewish novelist who has run out of things to write about. Nathan Zuckerman (protagonist of two earlier Roth novels, *The*

Dr. Winchell is author of William F. Buckley, Jr. *(Twayne).*

LIBERAL CULTURE

Hollywood's Pros

An item from Associated Press on Mr. Jack Nicholson, a popular movie thespian:

> Actor Jack Nicholson says his reputation as a womanizer and a cocaine user is 'good for business.'

As he is a typical product of the paltry liberal subculture, the semiliterate Mr. Nicholson seems not to understand the words he's uttering. A womanizer's may be an intriguing reputation—provided it has nothing to do with business. Once it has, it's no longer a business but a profession. The oldest one. □

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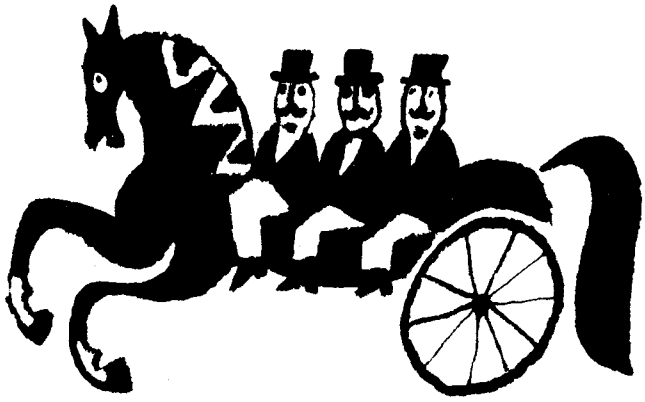
Ghost Writer [1979] and *Zuckerman Unbound* [1981]) is reduced to an almost infantile level of dependency by an unexplained pain which runs through



his neck and shoulders. Racked with guilt over the death of his parents (his brother contends that their father never recovered from Zuckerman's publication of *Carnovsky*—an autobiographical novel about growing up in a repressive Jewish household); addicted to a pain-killing combination of Percodan, vodka, and marijuana; and bored with a harem of mistresses who serve as surrogate Jewish mothers; Zuckerman is finished as a novelist.

Whether or not Zuckerman's creator is similarly finished is an open question; that his relationship to his material has become increasingly attenuated isn't. Because nearly everyone whom Zuckerman encounters fears ending up as a character in a Zuckerman novel, the events in *The Anatomy Lesson* are not only part of Roth's narrative but also potentially part of a book which his protagonist might write. The result is a kind of metarealism; for a novelist like Nathan Zuckerman (or Philip Roth?) life is essentially part of the prewriting process.

In a recent interview, Roth identified the theme of the Zuckerman novels as "the unreckoned consequences of art." In *The Anatomy Lesson* Zuckerman is "longing to *escape* his art, to be released from the rewards, from the readers and from the meaning given to his work, from the relentless self-consciousness and the endless self-mining and the moral paradoxes inherent in the vocation." Accordingly, Zuckerman decides to abandon his present calling and pursue a career as a physician. Already 40 and possessing no aptitude for science, this ambition is more than a trifle quixotic. Zuckerman imagines that doctors are productive citizens who are constantly in touch with reality, while writers are parasitic loners who live in a world of neurotic dreams.

The moral pomposity and self-delusion of his decision to take up medicine establishes ironic distance between Zuckerman and his creator. (The notion that such a career move would prove an antidote to spiritual malaise is hardly original: Saul Bellow used it in *Henderson the Rain King*, as did Walker Percy in *The Moviegoer*.) However, the impulse which drives Zuckerman to such extreme action is meant to be accepted at face value. The "unreckoned consequences of art" are moral as well as aesthetic. And yet the character of whom Zuckerman is most contemptuous is the morally righteous literary critic Milton Appel.

Appel is the prototypical neoconser-

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

The Conservative Humanitarian

"The dazzling achievements of postwar Europe do not make up the complete picture of the situation. Undoubtedly, in most humane aspects Western Europe has made remarkable advances compared to its nationalistic, militaristic, imperialistic past. If the verdicts of history were rendered by a court concerned about the treatment of mankind, postwar Western Europe would have little to worry about. But while peace, brotherhood, a high standard of living, and individual freedom are desirable and admirable traits, they count for little in the scheme of world history, which revolves around power. Paradoxically, it is those very newly established virtues that have put Europe's survival in jeopardy."

—from "Basking in the Afterglow"
by Stephen J. Sniegoski

ALSO

Opinions & Views—Commendables—Waste of Money
In Focus—Perceptibles—The American Proscenium
Journalism—Notables—Screen—Music—Art—Confluences
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vative, an old-time Jewish radical who has moved to the right both culturally and politically. Once an admirer of Zuckerman, Appel now accuses his former protege of anti-Semitism and challenges him to do an Op-Ed piece on behalf of Israel. Zuckerman finds Appel to be an insufferable prig who is trying to atone for his youthful rebellion with senile moral posturing. Unfortunately, Roth fails to develop the rich potential of the Appel-Zuckerman feud. This failure reflects a fundamental moral confusion on Roth's part. Although he is not ready to endorse neoconservatism himself, Roth is careful to filter his criticism of Appel through the distorted lens of Zuckerman's animus. Because Zuckerman and his absurd medical fantasies provide no alternative moral norm, readers are left with the sense that the consequences of art are not only unreckoned but ultimately unfathomable.

Bereft of experiences and observations, the realistic novelist can always turn to history for narrative resources. To do so, however, is to raise the question of why one would choose to write a historical novel as opposed to a straightforward historical discourse. The answer would seem to be that a historical novel is merely a *version* of the past, whereas more conventional histories must maintain at least the illusion of objectivity. Thus, a work of historical fiction is likely to say as much about the period during which it is written as about the one in which it is set. This is certainly true of Louis Auchincloss's *Exit Lady Masham.*

Ostensibly the memoir of a woman who rises from obscure origins to become a servant and confidante of Queen Anne, Auchincloss's novel reflects many of the concerns of present-day America. In the character of his narrator/protagonist Abigail Hill, Auchincloss gives us a witty and sensitive modern woman who—through the magic of fiction—is allowed to consort with the Duke of Marlborough, Jonathan Swift, and Anne Stuart herself. There is even something of an inchoate feminist sensibility in her description of the lot of women as depicted in Restoration comedy. She tells us that "the female of the species had two choices in the stage world of Congreve, both humiliating: to yield at the altar and become, soon enough, a betrayed spouse, or to yield without sanction of the altar and become a whore."

As the friend and agent of Tories seeking to influence national policy, Abigail helps to end a bloody European war. Auchincloss thus posits an ideological conflict between Whig greed and Tory benevolence. The 18th-century liberalism of the Duke of Marlborough results in international war and domestic poverty, while the noblesse oblige of Swift, Harley, and St. John brings peace and a genuine concern for the poor. Auchincloss seems to be arguing for a traditionalist conservatism which is not directly wedded to laissez-faire capitalism. Those who have followed the recent philosophical debates of the right will recognize this as what George Will calls "conservatism properly understood."

Although Auchincloss lacks Roth's manic energy, he more than compensates with an elegant prose style and coherent world view. The difference between Roth and Auchincloss is the difference between scatology and irony. To see that this is so, one need only compare any of Zuckerman's statements of sexual ennui with Abigail's description of her husband Samuel Masham: "His present indignation was as feigned as his erstwhile ardor; he had no passions at all, only a mild acquisitiveness." In style as well as setting, *Exit Lady Masham* seems of another age.

While one hesitates to draw sweeping conclusions on the basis of only two novels, *The Anatomy Lesson* and *Exit Lady Masham* do suggest some of the problems and prospects facing contemporary American realism. Philip Roth seems to have gone stale because he has used up his ethnic roots and has no new inspiration to draw upon other than the angst of the successful writer. By fashioning a historical narrative which can be instructive for our time, Louis Auchincloss has found a limited solution to the autobiographical dilemma. Seen through the perspective of time, the communal past is often more "real" than the personal present. □

In the Mail

Problems in Administrative Reform **edited by Robert Miewald and Michael Steinman; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** The subjects discussed are reforms at the national, state, and local levels. All in 15 essays.

Bureaucratic Power in Society **by Richard Chackerian and Gilbert Abcarian; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** Argues that the bureaucratic mind-set is beginning to invade the home.

Foreign Policy Behavior of Caribbean States: Guyana, Haiti, and Jamaica **by Georges A. Fauriol; University Press of America/Center for Strategic and International Studies; Washington, DC.** This subject may seem marginal—until you consult the front page of a newspaper on practically any given day.

Drek Sblak **by J. Inchardi; Sirius Books; Freeport, ME.** Repeat the title several times, quickly.

A Happy Childhood **by William Matthews; Atlantic-Little, Brown; Boston.** Any poetry collection including "An Elegy for Bob Marley" can make for an unhappy reading.

A Bibliography of American Literature Translated into Romanian **by Thomas A. Perry; Philosophical Library; New York.** The first American writer to make it was Ben Franklin, in 1833. The text: *Way to Wealth.* Other favorites: Andrew Carnegie's *How to Make a Fortune* and Dale Carnegie's *The Way to Win Friends and Influence People.* Makes one wonder about the intersection of reading habits and reality in Romania.

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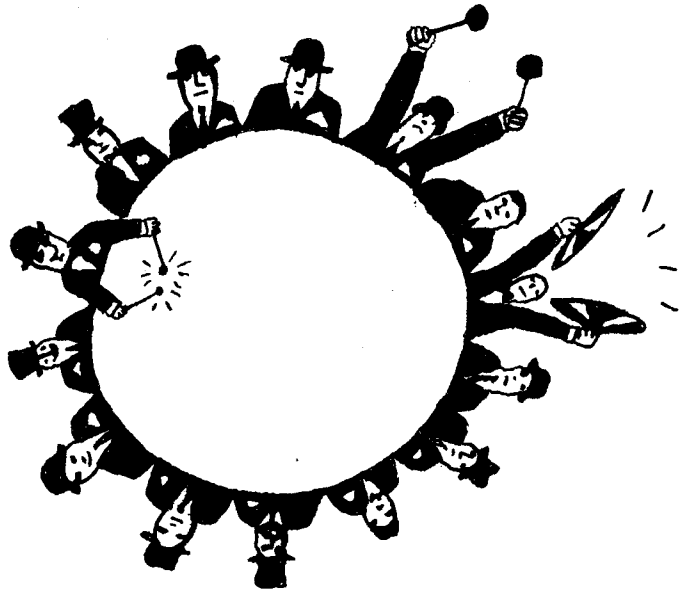
Reaping the Red's Harvest

Diane Johnson: *Dashiell Hammett: A Life;* Random House; New York.

by Gary S. Vasilash

> Spade sat down in the armchair beside the table and without any preliminary, without an introductory remark of any sort, began to tell the girl about a thing that had happened some years before in the Northwest. He talked in a steady matter-of-fact voice that was devoid of emphasis or pauses, though now and then he repeated a sentence slightly rearranged, as if it were important that each detail be related exactly as it happened.
>
> *The Maltese Falcon*

The story that Spade told the girl had absolutely nothing to do with recovering the "dingus," the "Black Bird"; he explained, "A man named Flitcraft had left his real-estate-office, in Tacoma, to go to luncheon one day and had never returned." Spade's job was to find the man and to find out what had happened to him. In effect, his job as a detective is not unlike the task faced by a biographer. While Spade's story was essentially unmotivated, just a means by which to kill some time until Joel Cairo arrived, biographer Diane Johnson, whose previous book is a collection of essays entitled *Terrorists and Novelists,* has a reason to tell the story of Dashiell Hammett. One possible motive could be that Hammett is, modestly, fashionable today thanks to a film made by German director Wim Wenders, based on a novel by Joe Gores, and made available through Coppola's Zoetrope organization. Gores, who has written a number of detective books, served a stint as an investigator in order to write his hard-boiled *Hammett,* wherein the title character is forced by circumstances to aid the Pinkerton Agency, for which Hammett actually worked. The plot is so-so, the telling is often vulgar, and several punches are thrown (all the way to literally bashing in heads) throughout, so it has all the elements for a modern movie. Still, both the Wenders and Gores versions of *Hammett* must have had but a tangential effect on Johnson who, the evidence in *The New York Review of Books* seems to indicate, is a serious critic, not one to address herself to a minor genre like detective fiction—unless it can be used to support a grander theme. Johnson is shrewd; she knows that she cannot simply bleat out her adulation for Hammett, that she must write "in a steady matter-of-fact voice... devoid of emphasis." And her biography becomes a report that would make a Continental Op smile.



For most people, Dashiell Hammett is a figure filtered through Hollywood. *The Maltese Falcon* is always uttered in tones reserved for films like *Citizen Kane;* the 1941 version with Humphrey Bogart, Sidney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre, directed by the then-neophyte John Huston, has achieved monument status (the 1931 and 1936 versions are not unlike missing persons). Then there is, of course, *The Thin Man* (1934) with William Powell and Myrna Loy, or that should be *The Thin Men,* given *After the Thin Man* (1937), *Another Thin Man* (1938), *Shadow of the Thin Man* (1942), *The Thin Man* TV show with Peter Lawford and Phyllis Kirk. People know that *Bogart* and *Spade* are basically synonymous; even those who always lose at trivia games know that Nick and Nora Charles have a dog named Asta. But what was filmed or broadcast isn't exactly what Hammett wrote; the filtered image is a false one.

Given the date of his birth, May 27, 1894, Johnson feels no prickling of doubt as she says "Hammett" in the same breath with Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner. Perhaps this is so because people like André Gide were worked up about the writer who, in Gide's words, was able to render "the last word in atrocity, cynicism, and horror," all things, then, that Gide and his ilk saw as being characteristically American. Gender and occupation aside, the only thing that Dashiell Hammett had in common with Fitzgerald, Hemingway,

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Mr. Vasilash is contributing editor to Chronicles of Culture.

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and Faulkner was a drinking problem. Wim Wenders was influenced by *film noir* which, particularly when the products were American, had its heyday in Europe in the 1940's; Gide's comment was written in 1944. Thus, Wender's *Hammett* and Gide's excess can be at least understood with regard to the context. Johnson, however, is another story. Dashiell Hammett wrote five novels; those books and a number of short stories, many of which are about the Continental Op, essentially constitute his complete works. The novels, unlike those of Raymond Chandler, have not aged well; they are clearly period pieces. While they once excited people ranging from the readers of *The Black Mask* to Blanche Knopf, today they are effectively museum pieces or curios for those interested in the history of American popular culture. Granted, Hammett was an innovator in the genre, but the new rapidly and inexorably becomes old, so even an innovator must provide something of enduring value in his work, and that something is missing in the novels of Hammett. Chandler gave his Marlowe legs through stylistic means; it wasn't a great accomplishment in the history of literature, but the style is solid and provides life. Once taken out of their period, Hammett's novels figuratively stumble, as there is virtually nothing to support them, and seem literally moribund. (Even Hollywood seems to have discerned the difference between the works of Chandler and Hammett: it continues to cast actors like Elliot Gould and Robert Mitchum in the Marlowe role with all of the predictable, horrible consequences yet all but ignores—and not out of mercy—Hammett's heroes.)

The novels of Hammett probably wouldn't have caused too great a stir even when they appeared had the Great Depression not made people anxious to find diversions and had Hammett's stint as a detective not been touted. About the latter, Hammett himself was to note in 1956: "I found I could sell . . . stories easily when it became known I had been a Pinkerton man. People thought my stuff was authentic." Hammett's novels were published in the period from 1929 to 1934. 1929 saw the publication of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *A Farewell to Arms; Tender Is the Night* appeared in 1934. The paltriness of Hammett's works becomes enormous by comparison.

His first novel is *Red Harvest.* The working title was *Poisonville,* which Blanche Knopf nixed, calling it "a hopeless title." Although there is a member of the I.W.W. in the novel, the *red* in the title actually refers to blood; as the operative who narrates the story puts it at one point, "There's been what? A dozen and a half murders since I've been here. . . . That's sixteen of them in less than a week, and more coming up." Less blood gushes in a Brian de Palma movie. After making that tabulation, the protagonist guzzles a few gin-and-laudanum cocktails. Hammett takes that opportunity to try his hand at a bit of post-*Ulysses* dream rendering, an attempt that would be laughable if it wasn't so wooden. (Some years later, when *PM* newspaper was being planned, Hammett proposed to write a review of *Finnegans Wake;* Johnson says, "He was among the few who thought it better than *Ulysses.*" Given his efforts, I wonder how he could tell, Johnson's claim, "Hammett liked writing that was hard work, he liked it to taste of Art," notwithstanding.)

The Dain Curse followed. It is certainly more complex than *Red Harvest,* but that is a function of the fact that it is separated into three parts: chop, chop. The blood lust is quelled when the predecessor is considered, but even Dracula takes a break. Whereas *Red Harvest* is set in a Montana mining town that might just as well have been one anywhere, given the fact that it has little significance (i.e., any place with a jail, warehouses, a couple of speakeasys, and a rundown neighborhood would do), in *The Dain Curse* Hammett moved to San Francisco, which became his fictional base. When Faulkner's South, Hemingway's Europe, Fitzgerald's East, and even Chandler's L.A. are considered, Hammett's set is merely plywood and fog produced with dry ice. *The Dain Curse* appeared in 1929, the same year that *The Roman Hat Mystery* by Messrs. Dannay and Lee—better known as Ellery Queen—did. Ellery Queen employed what is referred to as the "fair play" rules for mystery writers, which means that it's *possible* for the reader to figure out the solution. Hammett, author of the nonfiction "From the Memoirs of a Private Detective" (*Smart Set,* March 1923), probably figured that only bona fide cops could unravel cases, so in his books it is virtually impossible to tell the villain from the confidant (especially since they turn out to be one in the same in *The Dain Curse*), which is probably less realistic than pinning it on the butler.

Chronologically, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) follows, but *The Glass Key* (1931) more closely resembles the first two novels and so provides a curious map of progression of the writer. *Red Harvest* has a town that's marbled with corruption; *The Glass Key* concentrates on politicians and their minions, all of whom are as pure as a cesspool. *Red Harvest* includes a good guy, albeit one who announces, "It's this damned town. Poisonville is right. It's poisoned me"; *The Glass Key* has only tainted characters, perhaps to be in line with the "social realism" rampant in the 1930's. The plot is as complicated (read: "mixed-up") as that of *The Dain Curse.* While all fiction is "made up" as the author goes along, some authors—especially post-Poe mystery writers—provide hints that indicate that the denouement isn't as much a surprise to them as it is to the reader. That's not so in the novels of Hammett; his unraveling is not of the school of Theseus; it resembles floundering. *The Glass Key* has the distinction of including one of the most ridiculous scenes in all hard-boiled fiction; indeed, it seems nothing more than half-baked. Putative hero Ned Beaumont is beaten to the point of unconsciousness. When he comes to he discovers that his "face

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CONFLUENCES

Mysterious Activities

The Politics of Interpretation (University of Chicago Press; Chicago), edited by W. J. T. Mitchell, contains essays and responses to them by some of the leading literary theorists of our time—Booth, Bruns, Graff, Hirsch, Kristeva, Said, and others. One of the more lively controversies that emerge in the text has little to do with deconstructing, reconstructing, or similar critical activities. Instead, the readers witness a verbal wrestling match between Ronald Dworkin and Stanley Fish that's set off about, around, and through Miss Agatha Christie. That high-minded scholars can have low-rent interests is made even more clear in the recent work of Matthew J. Bruccoli. If it's modern, American, and has pushed a pen, then it's a subject for the seemingly tireless Bruccoli. He has gone from James Gould Cozzens to *Ross Macdonald* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich; San Diego).

Macdonald, of course, was influenced by Hammett and Chandler, but he described W. H. Auden as "the most important single influence on my life." Auden taught at the University of Michigan, where Macdonald was a student. The student went on to receive a doctorate. Academe was left behind, but it was not forgotten; Macdonald became chums with Hugh Kenner, Donald Davie, and Marshall McLuhan; his works are studded with references to the travails of Oedipus, even though they are generally thought to be merely "hard-boiled" detective books. Dworkin, Fish, and Bruccoli make it clear that there can be something worthwhile in what may seem to be trifles—and that there's often a child behind the pedant. □

was swollen and bruised and blood-smeared. Dried blood glued his shirt-sleeve to the wrist the dog had bitten and that hand was caked with drying blood.... His right arm hung useless." Ten short paragraphs after consciousness "Ned Beaumont was driven back against the wall. The back of his head struck the wall first, then his body crashed against the wall, and he slid down the wall to the floor." He's brought to by a dousing in a cold shower, beaten till he's out, awakens, is beaten, and so on. Hammett, the stickler for verisimilitude (he provided the readers of the June 7 and July 3, 1930, *Saturday Review of Literature* with a 24-item list including details on things ranging from "The Colt's .45 automatic pistol has no chambers" to "'Youse' is the plural of 'you'"), provides a character in Beaumont who presages the 1938 emergence of Superman. The man takes a licking and keeps on ticking, ultimately cracking the case.

As previously mentioned, Hollywood made a number of features *related* to Hammett's works during the 1930's and 40's, *The Maltese Falcon* being, of course, the most well-known. While the Sam Spade played by Bogart is a tough but essentially likable character, the Sam Spade in the pages of the novel is a hard, vicious, self-centered thug. Consider the first paragraph of the novel:

> Samuel Spade's jaw was long and bony, his chin a jutting v under the more flexible v of his mouth. His nostrils curved back to make another, smaller v. His yellow-grey eyes were horizontal. The v *motif* was picked up again by thickish brows rising outward from twin creases above a hooked nose, and his pale brown hair grew down—from high flat temples—in a point on his forehead. He looked rather pleasantly like a blond satan.

He acts rather unpleasantly like the standard satan. At his most sympathetic he says to a woman who he thinks he loves, but who he must turn in to the police because they'll need someone to take a fall, "I hope to Christ they don't hang you, precious, by that sweet neck." He adds, "If they hang you I'll always remember you." (Part of the tough-guy patter, of course, is simply characteristic of the genre, but Spade's formulation is one that would be limned with hate even if it was uttered in the Queen's English.) In the final sentence of the book the widow of his partner, who was killed at the start of the novel, is ushered into his office; the two were in the midst of an affair. Bogart's Spade is almost as appealing as his Rick in *Casablanca* (which he made the following year). Hammett's Spade deserves the pummeling that Ned Beaumont received. While it is popularly thought that *The Thin Man* is William Powell, Nick Charles, that's not true to the novel, either. In the book the man is initially described as being "Tall—over six feet—and one of the thinnest men I've ever seen.... [H]is hair was almost white when I knew him. Usually needs a haircut, ragged brindle mustache, bites his fingernails." That description is a ringer for the author. The decomposed body of the slim character is discovered under a slab of concrete at the end of the book. Another biographical touch, beyond the petty gallows humor, is the way that Nick Charles is always asking for or having a drink. Malcolm Lowry's Geoffrey Firmin is less concerned with the bottle than Charles is, and so what Hammett may have fuzzily perceived as being droll is actually quite inane.

Dashiell Hammett died in 1961. *The Thin Man* was published in 1934. It was his last novel. For people like Diane Johnson, Hammett's most important writing began in 1935, when he began affixing his name to leftist and communist manifestos. He became an early leader in the League of American Writers, which was an offspring of the John Reed clubs. He chaired a committee of the Screen Writers Guild that, in 1938, raised funds for the communists in Spain and China. About this point in time Johnson writes, "Hammett's Marxism

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was sincere, if not his allegiance to the Communist Party," then, two sentences later, hastens to add, "for a time at least, he did what the Party told him." Hammett, of course, had shacked up with Lillian Hellman (who is always "Lillian" in Johnson's text); he left his wife and kids in 1929 and didn't bother to secure a divorce until 1938. "Free Love" was never one of his stated causes, but he lived as though it was one. In 1942 Hammett joined the U.S. Army. Perhaps he hoped it would cause Roosevelt to open a second front. He was separated from the service in 1945 because his drinking made him basically useless. However, Johnson notes, "Drunk or sober, he did his political tasks."

In 1948, 11 communist leaders were indicted under the Smith Act of 1940, which mandates registering and fingerprinting of aliens and makes possible the deportation of aliens convicted of un-American or subversive activities. The men were tried, convicted, sentenced to five years, and fined $10,000. They were released on bail. In June 1951 the Supreme Court heard an appeal and upheld the convictions. Four of the men jumped bail. The bail had been put up by the Civil Rights Congress, of which Hammett was one of the five trustees. Johnson says that the organization was "dedicated to the civil rights... mostly of Communist Party members." Hammett was subpoenaed in order to find out whether he had assisted any of the bail-jumpers, a sensible query, given the fact that the Civil Rights Congress had put up $20,000 for each of the men. Hammett took the Fifth and ended up being found in contempt of court. He was sentenced to six months in the federal prison in Ashland, Kentucky. If there had been even the slightest doubt before the trial, there was none afterwards: Hammett was officially canonized a saint of the American left.

Hellman has been keeping the flame stoked for some years now; Diane Johnson seems to be positioning herself to take over. Both women and those who venerate the man should reflect on a passage in *The Dain Curse,* as it says something about why they cling like barnacles to the corroded hull of a sinking ideology:

> Thinking's a dizzy business, a matter of catching as many of those foggy glimpses as you can and fitting them together the best you can. That's why people hang on tight to their beliefs and opinions; because, compared to the haphazard way in which they're arrived at, even the goofiest opinion seems wonderfully clear, sane, and self-evident.

Reason and belief act as moorings for many, but clearly not for those who sanctify a third-rate hack. □

Terrorists' Tea Party

David Caute: *Under the Skin: The Death of White Rhodesia;* Northwestern University Press; Evanston, IL.

by Otto J. Scott

David Caute's book on the fall of a white government and the triumph of Mugabe in Zimbabwe contains neither an index nor sources. The events it describes are almost entirely inside Rhodesia-Zimbabwe. By restricting his descriptions, Mr. Caute effectively evades mentioning a number of significant matters. This sort of sleight of hand is more common to journalists than to scholars; Mr. Caute was formerly a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, a visiting professor at both New York and Columbia Universities. In other words, Mr. Caute knows better. He knows that a narrative that deliberately omits significant factors is inherently dishonest and misleading—or at least he should know that.

The book is ostensibly based upon Caute's original dispatches from Rhodesia to Britain during the period from 1977 to 1980. It is plausible to assume that these dispatches were altered after posting. His book is replete with withering personal characterizations that, had they been originally published, would have barred Mr. Caute from Rhodesia, and would certainly have earned him a sound thrashing.

Mr. Scott is a regular contributor to Chronicles of Culture.

He describes K. van der Byl, Minister of Defense, as "a social snob" with "swinish good-looks." The Minister of Law & Order is characterized as being "a man with the flushed complexion and silver-smooth hair of a saloon-bar bigot," as if hair tonic has some sort of sociological significance. Caute calls Ivor Richards, a British politician, "the porky son of a Welsh coal-miner." How's that for an unprejudiced description? Describing the Selous Scouts (white Rhodesian special forces), Mr. Caute notes that "their emblem was a fierce bird of prey and they wore brown berets (when not disguised as Zanla, Zipra or baboons)."

Having no sense of manners, Caute provides an acid portrayal of the couple that was kind enough to make him a houseguest. Alex Maddocks, proprietor of a "nostalgia shop" in Salisbury in 1977, is described as backdating sales invoices to evade export restrictions. Alleged economic pilfering isn't sufficient, it seems, for Caute goes on to maintain that the man "does not invariably go straight home. A drink in Miekles may suit his mood. Or a drink plus girl in the Ambassador.... Otherwise he may drive down to Annabelle's massage parlor on Rotten Row.... Specializing as she does in pelvic massage, Annabelle has 'the utmost faith in Rhodesia' and offers a ten percent discount to all members of the security forces." The Maddocks family was trusting enough to let Mr. Caute into their home. He reciprocated by regaling readers with how "lovely, 18-year-old daughter Sharon" took an ad agency photogra-

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pher into her bedroom and locked the door. "At first her mother screamed and took it as a personal insult . . . but Sharon looked pityingly at Sheila and asked whether she had ever done anything before she got married a hundred years ago and that just about ended the battle." Perhaps Caute isn't a scholar but a writer for seamy confessional magazines.

Acidulous description of white Rhodesians abound, but then so—to be fair—do descriptions of frightful atrocities by the blacks. Yet even these descriptions, which might provide the casual reader with the sense of authorial objectivity, are frequently subtly undercut. For instance, the death of tiny white Natasha Glenny "provided the Salisbury regime with an ideal propaganda weapon. The smiling, cherubic features of this chubby six-month-old baby appeared on the Ministry of Information's pamphlet, *Massacre of the Innocents.*" Presumably that usage underscored a tactical error, rather than a crime.

But Mr. Caute has heroes. One was "an officious French journalist from Le Something" who asked exasperating questions of Alex Maddocks, straining the patience of his host. But "the man from Le Something is not abashed," said Mr. Caute. "He expects to meet hostility, even violence, *in a white imperialist racist community facing a revolutionary uprising of the impoverished and exploited peasant masses.*" (Italics added.)

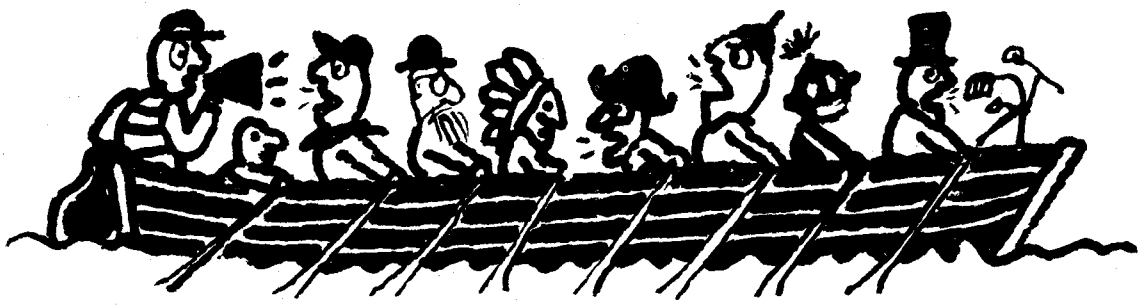
Racist is a word Mr. Caute tosses around with remarkable ease—but only in association with whites. Blacks are moved by resentment, ambition, pride, lust, and other recognizably human attributes, but *never* by racism. His partisanship is open. He depicts the steady decline of the authority of the white government with the satisfaction of an undertaker. This makes for somber reading. At first the attacks were isolated. In time they became so numerous that automobile convoys were necessary. The toll mounted steadily, with missions and schools being special targets. At no point does Mr. Caute describe an assault by the "freedom fighters" upon a barracks, a police station, or the armed forces. His heroes specialized in murdering civilians, in the special way of sowing terror that was invented by our own John Brown and which is now familiar around the world.

This form of "struggle" is heavily reliant upon the media and intellectuals to provide noble rationalizations for barbarous deeds. John Brown in Kansas benefited from false legends of self-defense and heroism invented by Northern journalists. Today, the liberal press does not bother to invent such mundane justifications for terrorists; the nobility of their cause is considered sufficient. This opinion, spread through the global media and accepted by liberals everywhere, led to decolonization by the West. The white residents of Rhodesia watched the decolonization of Nyasaland in their north (to which Rhodesia was once attached) with full knowledge that Whitehall planned the same for the south. That led to a unilateral declaration of independence and the election of Ian Smith. Because of those actions, Rhodesia was ostracized, subjected to UN sanctions, and pilloried by the media. The Kremlin (a great capital of freedom), Peking (fortress of liberty), Havana (a bastion of mercy), Washington (a center of idealism) and Whitehall (the soul of tolerance) bellowed in unison.

The U.S.S.R. and the Peoples Republic of China provided arms, uniforms, money, inspiration, and the diligent pens of their slaves and sympathizers to the cause of black majority rule in Rhodesia. And although Smith's regime held out for 13 grueling years, it finally fell.

The manner and reasons for its fall are, of course, worthy of a book, but not the sort of book that Mr. Caute has written. What is needed is an examination of the arguments that led the West to cooperate in the expansion of totalitarian rule in Africa. For, of course, Mugabe's election was the last the people of Zimbabwe will enjoy for some undefinable—but certainly long—time.

The author of such a future book will find Mr. Caute's peculiar contribution an interesting case in deracination and alienation. The Caute vision, which regards murders by blacks as excusable and ordinary social intercourse among whites as peculiarly evil, constitutes a case of cultural lunacy startling in its bias but not (unfortunately) uncommon. Curiously, although its zealots are numerous among us, we have not yet analyzed why so many persons like Caute hate their own kind so much that they help promote the spread of tyranny. This puzzle may, unless we solve it, get us all killed.



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To read Caute's book is to realize that nothing less than the defeat of the West will satisfy him. Smith's regime expanded the franchise to all citizens who were not busy shooting, and created a new constitutional government with a black prime minister, a black president, and a black majority parliament in a free election. Mr. Caute remained unimpressed because whites retained control of the judiciary, army and police, and a third of the parliament. Both Britain and the U.S. rejected the compromise. Guerrillas had to be admitted to governance. Pressure was applied, and a London conference was held. Nkomo and Mugabe attended. New elections were held under British auspices, and Mugabe won. The fact that he represented the majority black tribe in Rhodesia appears to have been the determining factor. On the night the returns were final, Mr. Caute bought drinks for some young white Rhodesian soldiers. He has provided the readers with a full account of their bitter and profane remarks, thanks to the tape recorder he says he had hidden in his pocket, which we thought is a ploy that only "imperialist" C.I.A. agents use.

Caute wraps the book up by describing some of the results: the flight of whites, the brutal misuse of authority. "White or black," he says with a shrug, "this was Africa; the Government rules." But he connects that philosophy only to Mugabe: he doesn't apply it to Ian Smith, nor to the whites. His book ends before the North Korean-trained forces of Mugabe swept into Matabeleland and committed a series of massacres.

Mr. Caute, of course, will not write anything about these massacres, their significance, or the race of their perpetrators. Racism, to Caute, is a sin unique to whites. By this assumption he feels armored in virtue and invulnerable to opposition.

But to switch targets does not absolve a bigot, nor does it alter the nature of prejudice. If, after this book-length evidence of his malice and limitations, Mr. Caute is still welcome in any circle, it will be a circle that includes no sensible people. Northwestern University made a serious mistake in publishing this weird, hate-filled book. □

Promise, Progress & Confusion

Ruth Horowitz: *Honor and the American Dream: Culture and Identity in a Chicano Community;* Rutgers University Press; New Brunswick, NJ.

Carlos G. Vélez-Ibañez: *Bonds of Mutual Trust: The Cultural Systems of Rotating Credit Associations among Urban Mexicans and Chicanos;* Rutgers University Press; New Brunswick, NJ.

by Steven Hayward

Mexican-Americans have been more maliciously stereotyped than blacks at times, perhaps partly due to their ethnic idiosyncrasies, and perhaps partly because they have not, until recently, been in the mainstream of civil-rights battles and have not had articulate national spokesmen. The language barrier, at issue in the bilingual education debate, would seem to enforce their isolation from mainstream America. Latino politicians can be heard repeating the old canard that progress lies in affirmative-action programs and increased educational opportunities, while others stress that the path to assimilation is through greater self-discipline and a back-to-basics approach.

It is likely that commentators on both sides are wide of the mark, for the nature of Chicano culture remains largely hidden. In *Honor and the American Dream,* Ruth Horowitz banishes some stereotypes, confirms others, and provides a somewhat disheartening picture of a culture not in harmony with the rest of American society. Horowitz's book is another in the "personal experience" genre; the book is based on her residence in Chicago's 32nd Street Chicano community. Though Horowitz is a sociologist, her book does not drift off into sociological gibberish, nor is it mere storytelling. Well-organized and readable, *Honor and the American Dream* is a comprehensive picture of a Chicano community.

Honor and reputation are highly important to the residents of 32nd Street, but it is a superficial and mutable idea of honor seemingly unconnected with any notion of virtue. Several sets of norms and parts of the code of honor conflict with each other. The attitudes about sex provide an apt illustration. Young women are expected to maintain their virginity until marriage: family honor depends on it. Yet women are supposed to be submissive to men, and men are encouraged to demonstrate their masculinity and prowess by seducing women. While it is socially acceptable for men to be sexually active, it is not socially acceptable for women; hence, the use of birth control is scarce. Birth control is objected to not on religious grounds, but because its use by a woman would signify her "loose morals." If, however, a woman submits "in a moment of passion," she is absolved of moral responsibility. The natural result is a high incidence of unwed motherhood, and very few women remain virgins until marriage. But unwed mothers are socially accepted, so long as their sexuality is seen as "bounded," or restrained, thus preserving a superficially honorable reputation.

It is also a sense of honor and reputation that is at the root of Chicano gang activity, according to Horowitz. Youth gangs provide a collective framework for asserting masculinity and "coolness." Violence is considered normal and appropriate behavior in the community, the only means of responding to insult and restoring honor. Many Chicanos remain attached to gangs well into adult-

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hood because, Horowitz believes, a sense of the self and belongingness is unavailable elsewhere in the community.

For most 32nd Street residents, the "American Dream" means chiefly mak-

ing money, the key to which is the acquisition of a high-paying job. Yet even with that ambition, most of the community remains economically marginal. Thirty-Second Street is not a slum. Its largely unskilled residents have a great deal of pride: "We are the respectable poor," explains one. But, as with sexual honor, paradoxes and ambiguities abound in the approach to education and economic advancement. Staying in school and getting an education are highly valued and praised by the community, and yet the dropout rate is very high. Many seem to lack the self-discipline, self-confidence, and patience required to succeed in school. Few of the 32nd Street residents think in terms of careers: a job is measured solely by how much it pays. Thus there is little long-term planning or foresight that would foster discipline, individual initiative, and creative thinking.

Horowitz's picture is not all negative, nor does she condescend to mouthing liberal platitudes. Chicano families are very stable, the divorce rate is very low, and motherhood is still highly esteemed, as yet unaffected by feminist propaganda. One hears no cant about "alienation" or various other new-age "identity crises." Many elements of their social world, Horowitz concludes:

> are ethnically based and freely chosen. These would not necessarily change if the economic situation shifted. For many residents, 32nd Street and ethnic identity offer them something of value... The United States as a melting pot may not only be unachievable but undesirable. Why should everyone be the same?

While Horowitz's is a helpful book, the same cannot be said for Carlos Velez-Ibañez's *Bonds of Mutual Trust.* The problem with this book is that it is a "full length treatment" of a rather minor subject: Rotating Credit Associations (RCA's). An RCA is essentially an informal credit union of sorts. Members of an RCA make regular contributions, and each takes a turn at receiving the total sum collected. Vélez-Ibañez is interested in the mutual trust needed to form RCA's in Chicano communities, and in the mutual trust and confidence nourished by the successful operation of RCA's.

But Vélez-Ibañez, a university anthropologist, writes a dreadful academic prose that is both redundant ("adaptive flexibility") and unnecessarily obscure ("interstitial dimensions"). For anyone untrained in decoding such heavy-handed anthropological malarkey, the book is nearly unreadable. This is unfortunate, for it provides some good information here and there, and RCA's have been successful in engendering those virtues that Horowitz found missing in Chicanos: self-discipline, long-range planning, economic advancement, and responsible obligation to oneself and others. It is regrettable that the author turned an otherwise useful inquiry into an academic tome. □

Bombs Away?

John J. Mearsheimer: *Conventional Deterrence;* Cornell University Press; Ithaca, NY.

Paul Bracken: *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces;* Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

by Alan J. Levine

Two of the major problems facing Western defense and foreign policy are truly Siamese twins: that of deterring nuclear war, and the possibility of a conventional Soviet invasion of Europe. They are intimately linked, for in the event that we are unable to stop an invasion of Europe, we are—theoretically—bound to use nuclear weapons, if only tactical ones. And that may well lead to full-scale nuclear war, for few people nowadays have much confidence in the likelihood of limiting the use of nuclear weapons in a European war. While these two books tend to decouple these problems, they are useful analyses of the dilemmas facing us. This is especially true of Mearsheimer's *Conventional Deterrence,* a work, that, despite some of its controversial and even dubious, interpretations of history, should be of interest to political and military analysts and to diplomatic and military historians. It is an extremely well-researched book that examines the problem of how, in contemporary situations, antagonistic nations decide to embark on nonnuclear war.

Mearsheimer limits his collection of relevant historical situations to the post-World War I period, the era in which tanks and planes have dominated land warfare; his view is that conventional warfare has not changed its essential nature since 1945, which is a point that some analysts might contradict. If Mearsheimer's scheme simplifies things in one sense—by allowing us to derive some help from experience—it is no comfort in other ways. As Mearsheimer readily shows, a measurement of the

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ratio of strength between two sides in terms of numbers and quality of weapons is no guide to ability to win or to deter an attack; a fact demonstrated by the German victory in the West in 1940 and Israel's victories over the Arabs in four wars. The effectiveness of arms depends on who is using them; planning and strategy counts as much as numbers, if not more.

In Mearsheimer's view, the ability to deter a conventional attack is largely a function of strategy, and very much a matter of preventing an enemy from acquiring the ability—or the belief in his ability—to make a blitzkrieg strategy effective. In his use of the term "blitzkrieg," Mearsheimer is a bit idiosyncratic, giving it a definition narrower than that which is usually used. To him, a blitzkrieg is a strategy aimed at a quick victory through paralysis and disruption of enemy forces rather than their destruction. Mearsheimer lumps all efforts to win by destroying or encircling enemy forces together as variants of "attrition," thus using "attrition" in a broader sense than usual. Ironically, Mearsheimer's juggling of definitions, which is not really very useful, has the effect of denying the German conquest of Poland in 1939 the title blitzkrieg—though that was the very event that led to the coining of the term. Some of Mearsheimer's historical evaluations are also surprising and questionable, e.g., that mobility and the use of tanks in warfare do not, in themselves, favor offense over defense. The experience of both World Wars and Korea seem to contradict this. Even in cases where sweeping armored advances are impossible, tanks have often made a decisive difference in enabling primarily infantry forces to advance. Mearsheimer's attempt to refute such critics of NATO's "forward strategy" and advocates of "mobile defense" as Edward Luttwak, may also be founded on a narrow reading of the historical record. Mearsheimer claims that there are only three cases on record of a blitzkrieg being stopped by a mobile defense of the sort urged by Luttwak. The record shows quite a few more, notably von Manstein's victory in South Russia in 1943. It is also by no means true that the Soviets' strategy against nazi Germany in World War II was one of simple attrition, though here Mearsheimer's odd definition may obscure his meaning.

Mearsheimer, however, accepts that the Soviets would like to be able to launch a blitzkrieg in Europe. He is fairly optimistic in his assessment of their inability to do so. The Warsaw Pact, while possessing a numerical superiority in men and arms, is not strong enough to make NATO's defense hopeless. (He dismisses their ability to launch a "standing start" or "bolt from the blue" attack.) Moreover, the terrain and urban sprawl in Germany are not too favorable to Soviet aims, canalizing an attacker's move into three relatively narrow and identifiable targets. Unlike many commentators, he maintains that "NATO is reasonably well-deployed to meet a Soviet blitzkrieg," and that even the forces of Britain and the Low Countries, whose abilities have been widely doubted, should be able to fulfill their responsibilities. Traditional characteristics of the Soviet forces, such as their extremely centralized control and the lack of encouragement, or even aspiration, for initiative in the lower ranks, are not favorable to the quick exploitation of opportunities needed to effect a blitzkrieg—though, he stresses, the Soviet Army is a formidable enemy. Further, technological changes such as the development of precision-guided munitions (PGMs) and the introduction of infantry-fighting vehicles, tend to reduce the possibilities of a blitzkrieg. Though Mearsheimer cautions against claims that such weapons are about to make the tank obsolete, they will force tanks to operate more cautiously and make them more dependent on slower, and less-blitzkrieg-oriented arms. In general, the problems facing the attackers are growing more complicated. PGMs will not cause a revolution in warfare, but they

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will swing the balance toward the defense, for a while.

If Mearsheimer is right, then the NATO defenses in Europe are in pretty good shape, but they may not be enough. He stresses that caution is required:

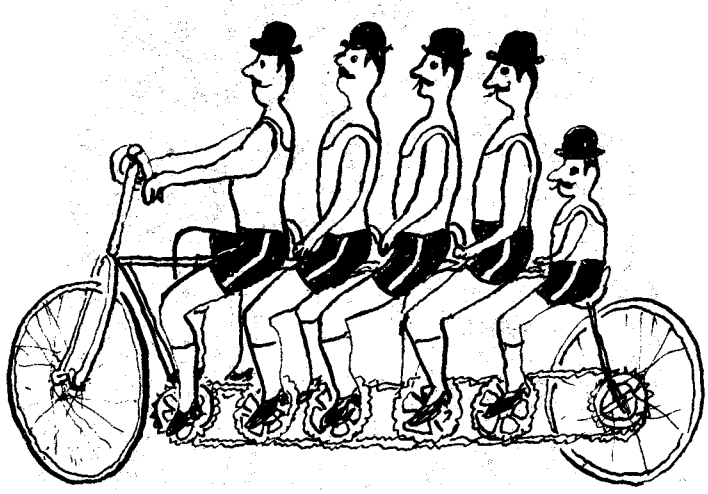
> For the cases examined here show that when a nation has a powerful motive for war, it will go to great lengths to find a suitable military strategy. Military planners will be subjected to unremitting pressure. Furthermore, a defender who becomes complacent is likely to be surprised, as were the Israelis in 1973 and the Allies in May 1940. The central message for status quo powers is clear; beware in a crisis, because your opponent is seeking a way to defeat you.

This is a lesson well worth remembering during discussions about nuclear war and worth keeping in mind when reading Paul Bracken's *Command and Control of Nuclear Forces,* though it is by no means Bracken's principal theme. He mainly concentrates on examining the interaction of intelligence, early-warning systems, and the military and political control of strategic nuclear weapons. Bracken is more concerned with the possible development of nuclear war by unintentional mutual "escalation" in a crisis than with a "bolt from the blue" attack. Despite more than a few genuflections in the direction of liberal arms-control orthodoxy, some of his conclusions should not be very comforting to the adherents of that program. Others won't be very comforting to anyone else, either.

For example, our warning and intelligence systems are far from perfect, for the collectors of intelligence are bringing in more data than can be used. There is a lack of the sort of officer or civilian official who has an overall grasp of defense problems; most involved have specialized expertise. Bracken doubts that nuclear war is likely to be precipitated by a false alarm or an accident in the usual sense. He suggests, in fact, that safeguards and precautions built into the system, as well as a well-settled propensity to dismiss a real attack as unthinkable, render a "mistake" unlikely—but these things may, instead, lay us open to a surprise attack. Since Soviet strategic doctrine, by Bracken's own admission, places great emphasis on "preemption" and the value of surprise, the discussion of this type of attack does merit more space than it receives.

Bracken emphasizes the problem of unintentional war in a different way. The danger is not that some electronic part will go haywire, but that control of the situation may be lost in a crisis when both sides go on the alert and try to interpret each other's closely observed moves on very short deadlines, for warning times are very short indeed. Hence, weapons that provide very short warning time, e.g., the Pershing 2 missile and the Soviet's Yankee class missile-firing submarines (which patrol off our shores) are "destabilizing" and arms control should focus on pullbacks of such weapons. Another point Bracken tries to make is that of the very likely uncontrollable nature of a nuclear war once it gets started; a ceasefire is going to be very tough to arrange after things get going. This would appear to be a point scored against those who discuss the possibility of "limited" nuclear war—that is, an exchange of attacks directed against military forces, rather than the mutual genocide people usually think of as nuclear war. However, this is not the case, for Bracken warns that "decapitation" attacks directed against political leaders and military headquarters and communications might just permit an attacker to avoid retaliation by his victim.

Whatever the worth of Bracken's evaluations, however, he gives a useful account of our nuclear warning systems and the evolution of American war plans. More important, the book reveals alarming gaps in American warning and communication systems. Some elements are extremely vulnerable to sabotage or other interruption. NORAD, the North American Air Defense Command Headquarters, apparently does not even have an adequate emergency power supply. Moreover, and it is a measure of the silliness of much of the discussion of arms issues that this sort of thing does not receive much attention—our missiles may not be very reliable, either. According to Bracken, the Minuteman missile, supposedly our main reliance, has received only three operational tests since the mid-1960's, and all three tests were failures. If this is the case, then it suggests that one important feature of nuclear war fully reproduces a lesson taught by past warfare: he who thinks that he can depend on peacetime preparations, and dependably predict or dictate the course of events, once armed conflict is unleashed, is a damned fool. □



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COMMENDABLES

Strategies & Schemes

Peter Hutchinson: *Games Authors Play;* Methuen; New York.

During a conversation with Jorge Luis Borges at the Ingersoll Prizes ceremony in Chicago last December, we were informed that, in his estimation, "Literature is supposed to be enjoyed." He added, "It is fun, is it not?" There was what can only be described as a whimsical look on his face when he uttered that rhetorical formulation. Many persons, when confronted with Literature, tend to drag on long faces. It becomes something to be endured, suffered, or otherwise undertaken. Perhaps this response stems from the fact that most encounter Literature as a subject, something taught in realms that are more often Gradgrindian than not. Consequently, the would-be reader cowers, quails, screws his courage to you-know-where, or turns on the TV. Part of this reaction can be ascribed to the history of English Literature as a bona fide Subject: when Eng. lit. courses were established in the late 19th century, they were justified on the basis of High Seriousness; talk of games was restricted to the bowling greens, and even there the discourse had little to do with anything that can be loosely defined as "fun." Many creators of Literature—Thomas Nashe, Shakespeare, Donne, Sterne, Wilde, Joyce, Nabokov, Borges—have a sense of "play," and throughout their works they, indeed, "play games" with their readers through the use of allegory, allusion, parody, puns, red herrings, and various and sundry other devices. Academics tend to handle the works as if they are archaeological relics that are ready to disintegrate and which will do so if not approached in the proper, respectable manner; it's a sourpuss (not a Cheshire cat) they resemble as they advance crab-like toward the Light (Sweetness causes tooth decay, don't you know [to borrow a flourish from Sayer's Sir Peter]).

Dr. Hutchinson, as his title may connote, is a serious man. Yet he undoubtedly cracks a smile every now and then. The title *Games Authors Play* alludes to Eric Berne's 1964 *Games People Play* and not to, as some wag might point out, Joe South's 1960 jukebox hit with Berne's title. The existence of things like Mr. South's record points out that one had better be prepared to apply a little bit of serious discrimination when it comes to chasing down literary hares. Dr. Hutchinson provides some apt instructions. □

Of Prose and Piety

James J. Thompson, Jr.: *Christian Classics Revisited;* Ignatius; San Francisco.

Among the many ends to which writers may put their words is that of leading the reader toward the divine Word of Christian belief. In the secularized world of modernity, such efforts, even when practiced with subtlety, insight, and creative intelligence receive remarkably little attention, however. As a devout Roman Catholic writer with a keen mind and a lucid style, James J. Thompson, Jr., former associate editor of *Chronicles of Culture,* makes a laudable effort in *Christian Classics Revisited* to provide greater visibility to authors and works in which the search for God and the exercise of human talent fruitfully combine. Though the emphasis on Catholic and Anglo-Catholic writers such as Ignatius Loyola, Cardinal Newman, T. S. Eliot, G. K. Chesterton, and Evelyn Waugh does reflect a discernible bias, Dr. Thompson proves himself catholic as well as Catholic in his perspicacious examination not only of Protestant writers such as John Woolman, Will Campbell, and Emil Brunner but also of the extremely marginal Christian James Agee. Primarily because of their brevity, his essays are only suggestive rather than definitive in their evaluations. But then anyone who agrees with Gerard Manley Hopkins that "Jesus Christ is the only true literary critic" does not expect definitive Judgment of books or men until another Day. (BC) □

IN FOCUS

Semitrivial Pursuits

Roger Scruton: *Kant;* Oxford University Press; New York.
Peter Singer: *Hegel;* Oxford University Press; New York.
J. O. Urmson: *Berkeley;* Oxford University Press; New York.
Michael Howard: *Clausewitz;* Oxford University Press; New York.
Peter France: *Diderot;* Oxford University Press; New York.
Peter Stansky: *William Morris;* Oxford University Press; New York.

While most things liberal tend to be perverse, distorted, or somehow malign, we do, however, support one thing that has the word *liberal* appended to it as an adjective: liberal education. Certainly, in this age of computerized, technocratic specialization, the world of bytes and bauds, wherein a degree in engineering translates into big bucks and hefty perks and a degree in one of the humanities often leads—if not to the door—to a low-paying job in a once-unimagined profession (e.g., a history major pushing furniture at Sears), there is something to be said for those people who try to internationalize the Arnoldian "best that has been known and thought." They deserve support, not saliva tests. But there is a danger inherent in the contemporary situation if the alternative to the specialist, the person who knows a great deal about a few things, is seen as being the generalist, *if* that generalist perceives his or her role as being, figuratively speaking, that of a river that's a mile wide and an inch deep. Such a person would know virtually nothing about a wide gamut of things; he or she would be qualified to be, at best, a champion player of Trivial Pursuit (i.e., "What was Newton's dog's name?" not "Talk about the Newtonian universe").

These thoughts are provoked by a series of slim—averaging 100 pages each—volumes on philosophers and writers produced by Oxford University

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Press. (The university was founded in 1167—should anyone ask.) Each of the books is authored by a person who is an expert in the specific field, and each of the authors is, as far as the present tasks are concerned, modest. One of the best of the self-effacing opening comments in any of the prefaces or initial remarks is found in Roger Scruton's *Kant:*

> I have tried to present Kant's thought in a modern idiom, while presupposing the least possible knowledge of philosophy. Since Kant is one of the most difficult of modern philosophers [later Scruton figures him "The greatest modern philosopher," which makes some of the other volumes suspect], I cannot hope that I have made every

> aspect of this thought intelligible to the general reader. It is not clear that every aspect of this thought has been intelligible to *anyone,* even to Kant.

Given the final sentence, it's hard to imagine that the rudimentarily educated "general reader" would care to ponder even a subatomic-sized rendering of *Critique of Pure Reason.*

Still, Scruton on Kant, Singer on Hegel, Urmson on Berkeley, Howard on Clausewitz, France on Diderot, and Stansky on Morris are, with minor variations and petty reservations, all worth an evening's reading. However, the books should all carry a Surgeon-General-cigarette-pack-like warning, one that would boldly state that anyone who thinks that he or she *knows* the subject in question through even the most careful reading of the volume at hand is damaging his or her mental health, to say nothing of that of those who will undoubtedly have to endure "learned" cocktail-party treatises. □

Pieces

Max Apple: ***Free Agents;*** Harper & Row; New York.

Picture a man. About five-eight-and-a-half in height, wire-rimmed glasses, curly hair, salt-and-pepper beard, blue brushed-cotton shirt, loose navy tie, khaki pants, and Top Siders. Picture him in two dimensions—as if he is a life-sized cartoon, like a Lichtenstein. Once the image is fixed, imagine it being torn vertically into two roughly equal pieces, with the appropriate onomatopoeic "r-r-r-i-i-i-i-p-p-p!" This is Max Apple. As is evident in this collection of prose pieces (some are obviously fiction; others, well, only his hairdresser—or agent—knows for sure), Apple is a man who cherishes tradition on the one hand and who is using his other hand to push ahead trendy, liberal concepts and lifestyles. This tension produces ragged thinking in polished prose. □

The Babes in Books

Reinhard Kuhn: ***Corruption in Paradise: The Child in Western Literature;*** Boston University Press/University Press of New England; Hanover, NH.

Presumably, since every adult was once a child, all adults should understand childhood. Somehow, however, the child remains a profound mystery to anyone who has left childhood. Trying to wrest understanding and utilitarian control out of that mystery, sociologists, psychiatrists, and pedagogues have amassed endless statistics, charts, graphs, theories, and tabularized parameters for children's behavior. Only the most childishly gullible suppose that these reductive methodologies actually fathom the meaning of life in the nursery.

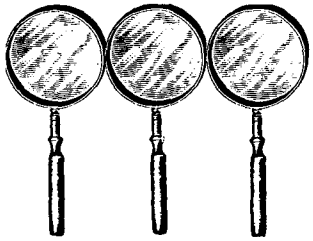
In *Corruption in Paradise* the late Reinhard Kuhn pours well-deserved scorn on those who use a phony "model of the child constructed and dissected by scientific discourse" often linked to "a radical political vision in which the family structure . . . is destined for abolition." A better approach to understanding childhood, Professor Kuhn believes, is one "that resolutely asserts the primacy of literature as a cognitive tool." Not that the view of children that literary artists offer is clear-cut or precise. On the contrary, childhood in literature remains an enigma; poetry and fiction explore but cannot finally resolve its ambiguities. A few writers, Kuhn acknowledges, have simplistically asserted the absolute goodness of children, have demonized civilized maturity, and have invoked "the platitudinous pieties of liberationism," but most have been more cognizant of the uncertainties and perplexities surrounding the young person. What Kuhn finds almost the whole tradition of Western literature saying unitedly, however, is that "the child has always been more or less central to human concerns." The disturbing exception

to that generalization is the modern novel in which "a door has indeed been closed on children." If, as Scripture avers, children miraculously help point the way to the kingdom of God, then adults who create such child-excluding works must be enroute to some other destination. (BC) □

Perceptibles

Cay Van Ash: ***Ten Years Beyond Baker Street;*** Harper & Row; New York.

In 1929, when producer David O. Selznick was still young enough to be designated a "Wunderkind," he came up with an idea for a story that could be a part of a movie revue called *Paramount on Parade.* As he wrote in a memo to a Paramount executive, "I wonder if it would not be entertaining to have a little burlesque in the Revue of Philo Vance (William Powell), and Sherlock Holmes (Clive Brook), in pursuit of Fu Manchu (Warner Oland)." It was an interesting concept more than 50 years ago, and is, apparently, still intriguing today. Cay Van Ash teams Holmes not with Vance but with Dr. Petrie, the man who, with Nayland Smith,



tracked the Chinese master-criminal through the pages of Sax

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Rohmer's books. Unfortunately, unlike Selznick's scheme, the book is not a burlesque but is serious, oh too serious. □

* * *

Richard Morris: *Dismantling the Universe: The Nature of Scientific Discovery;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot's title character asks, or muses, at one point, "Do I dare/Disturb the universe?" That question is but one of many in the poem; it is not, then, unlike the two found in one line, "Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" Fashion, fruit, and the universe: all are on par for the ironic persona. But, unfortunately, similar equations are made in real life, especially by writers who would be more well suited to spending their time rolling up the cuffs of their trousers. That is, a number of authors have taken it upon themselves to essay aspects of relativity, quantum mechanics, and other nuclear mysteries in the pages of books, novels in particular. As Richard Morris, a theoretical physicist, explains in his *Dismantling the Universe,* the way the universe works is so unlike anything found in a more quotidian reality that we can only conclude that the novelistic parallels are nonsense. We've always suspected as much, but thanks to Morris's lucid remarks on his realm, we're as sure as we can be—given the nature of what the universe might be. □

Waste of Money

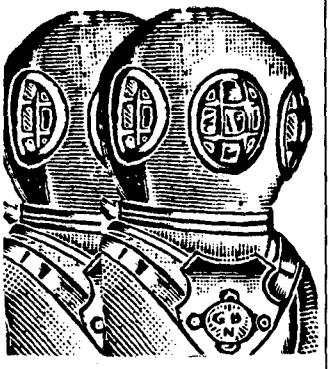
On the Trail of E.T.

George A. Seielstad: *Cosmic Ecology: The View from the Outside In;* University of California Press; Berkeley.

Gerald S. Hawkins: *Mindsteps to the Cosmos;* Harper & Row; New York.

When astronaut Bruce McCandless moved outside of the space shuttle *Challenger* last February and slowly (relatively speaking, that is) moved away from the ship sans umbilical cord, it was a big day for mankind, perhaps on par with that day in 1783 when Pilâtre de Rozier ascended in a Montgolfier balloon. The species Homo sapiens has gone a long way in a mere 201 years, yet when the universe as portrayed through words, pictures, and charts in George A. Seielstad's *Cosmic Ecology* is taken into account, our grand leap doesn't amount to even a pitiable tremor. Man has always looked to the stars; Gerald S. Hawkins, in *Mindsteps to the Cosmos,* essentially argues that man has always had a one-track mind, one that leads out (as Buckminster Fuller patiently explained, *up* and *down* are silly terms in the big picture). Seielstad moves from the center of the universe—or wherever it was that the Big Bang occurred—to Earth; Hawkins drifts from Earth to Who Knows Where.

It is remarkable that God doesn't emerge in the vastness that Seielstad tries to describe and explain through astronomy, physics, and other scientific methodologies. We may think ourselves to be Titans (no mere Montgolfier balloons for us), but we are not unlike subatomic particles in this universe—and are still more insignificant if, as



some scientists posit, there are an infinity of other universes. Hawkins, in his dance of "mind-steps," which are stages in man's intellectual growth with regard to his place in the universe, slides right past the Judeo-Christian God to an ultimate point that "could only involve tangible contact with a super-intelligence, the Omnipotent." Hawkins has spent too much time with stars in his eyes. Seielstad hasn't spent enough time looking within—and Beyond. □

One Step Behind

George Johnson: *Architects of Fear: Conspiracy Theories and Paranoia in American Politics;* Jeremy P. Tarcher; Los Angeles.

Before the world became a smaller place as a result of communications and transportation webs, apocryphal tales about magical and mystical powers emanating from sages in Africa and the Orient permeated the nooks and crannies of civilized environments. Today, when virtually every space is dominated by man, only "Atlantis" and possibly the South Pole (which some individuals maintain is the site of a gate to a nether world) remain as numinous spots on the globe. However, there has been no slack in the ridiculous beliefs, merely a reorientation of perspective. Now, for many persons, Outer Space holds the Answer. Grocery store tabloids shout through headlines about UFO's; popular so-called nonfiction pulp paperbacks posit that man will be saved by greater intelligence from other planets; SF films like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.* show a fictional (or is it? . . .) benign beyond, and even *The Right Stuff* movie implies that there are some things that technology cannot explain. There are, of course, terrestrial-oriented crackpots on the loose, sitting on the edges of their chairs waiting for the mutterings of Nostradamus to knock them off, or babbling about the conspiracies of the Catholic church, international bankers, etc., and/or the Illuminati.

The Order of the Illuminati was established in Bavaria in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt as a pro-Enlightenment outfit; it probably had all of the power of a glee club with a penchant for costumes and play acting. But some members and outsiders, then and since, blew the whole club up into grotesque proportions so that the Illuminati—or one of its predecessors or successors—can be found as the moving wedge when it comes to critical historical events: wars, economic crises, you-name-it. George Johnson, while working on stories for the *Minneapolis Star,* decided to debunk some of the grand schemes of the fringe theorists, such as those people who find secret meanings on the backs of one-dollar bills. His stories for that newspaper have been bloated into *Architects of Fear.*

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Johnson's deflating of others becomes self-inflating: he is a proud secular humanist. Before long, almost anyone in America who happens to be conservative or Christian turns into a member of what he calls the "Obscurati," a group that includes virtually all of the benighted boobs that Johnson finds littering the American landscape. After all, he insists, such people concern themselves with such things as tradition and God, not only progress and man. It becomes patently obvious that Johnson's illuminative mind captures all of the brilliance of a spent firefly. "Ah ha!" he would interject here, "You too are minions of the obstruction!" Well, if he's characteristic of the others, thank goodness we aren't on his side. □

Lower Life Forms

Joe Haldeman: *Worlds Apart;*
Viking Press; New York.

It's widely reported that in the event of a nuclear holocaust, the highly adaptive life form known by the sobriquet "cockroach" will inherit the remains. Joe Haldeman, in this science fiction sludge, posits a variation on this theme: the order Blattaria, in 2085, will include bipedal creatures that are now part of the Homo sapiens species. Not only will these noxious bugs have all of the qualities of the present-day roaches, but they will also have libidos that can be characterized by a Shakespearean epithet, "Goats and monkeys!" As the heroine of the tale says at one point, "What I do with my plumbing is my own business," and the polygamous lass is not referring to matters of pipes and wrenches. Haldeman's vision of progress is, quite clearly, regressive. □

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Editorial Comment

(continued from page 5)

mentioned it. Instead, the doctrine of cultural pluralism was triumphant.

Parallel developments affected public education. Critics such as Colin Greer argued that the schools had failed in their assimilative tasks in the past and could do no better now. The goal of "integration" represented a wistful mythology. At most, American society comprised a series of subsocieties based on ethnic identity. Social psychologist Otto Klineberg attacked the "middle class" stereotypes found in grade school texts—the intact suburban families, the comfortable homes, the clean clothes, the smiling people—and he urged greater sensitivity to cultural diversity. As the author of one primary school reader confessed in the mid-1960's, "My series . . . is middle class, white, and sometimes I am a little ashamed." Thus died the America of the "middle-class consensus."

At its 1982 convention the National Education Association affirmed its belief in "multicultural education" as "a way of helping *every* student perceive the cultural diversity of U.S. citizenry so that children of many races may develop pride in their own cultural legacy."

So public education has come full circle and is now devouring itself. Created as a means of inculcating shared values and a common social purpose, public schools now instruct students on how to recognize, cherish, and advance their differences. Forged in cultural wars against parochialism, public education now claims to be uniquely qualified to promote parochialism.

Some people ask: "Is the result so bad? Pluralism and diversity bring joy and variety, welcome relief from the drabness of conformity. Moreover, doesn't a pluralistic America still work? We still produce, we still consume, and in moral terms we are freer than ever before. Is there really a pluralism problem?"

Yes, I think there is. As theologian Richard Neuhaus suggests, the absolutized pluralism of today is the death of pluralism and a danger to all else that we hold dear. Poet Wallace Stevens said: "We live in the description of a place and not in the place itself." In our celebration of the "new pluralism," we Americans have lost our tenuous grip on the shared "description" of our place. We no longer can claim common normative values against which we can, as a community, judge normality and deviance, define our heroes and villains, or weigh the relative claims put forward by various political interests. Political power is now largely divorced from any moral foundation. Fears that the loss of a common moral vocabulary would result in Hobbesian chaos now seem justified. Most of our confused politicians, while spouting moralisms in profusion, no longer really weigh moral arguments; they merely consult their opinion polls and follow the drift.

So what's to be done? Simply put, we must intellectually reconstruct our understanding of American culture; we must build a renewed description of "our place." Our past errors have come in part from equating outward conformity with the true bonds of community: the mistake of successive efforts at defining the "American" lies in assuming that visible alikeness means unity. Indeed, the opposite may be true. Correctly seen, it is the pluralism of *externalities*—of food, clothes, skin color, habits, song, and speech—that can bring health, vitality, and excitement to a culture. It is the pluralism of *internalities*—of values, mores, and meanings—that brings social decadence and meaninglessness disguised as liberation.

Also, a source of our dilemma may lie in the very origin of the American experiment. Created in rebellion against Europe, claiming to be a "New Order For the Ages," the United States has had an uneasy relationship to the Western Civilization which gave it true birth. The values and meanings shaped by Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian thought are part of our very marrow as a nation. But these traditions are also dismissed as symbols of a narrow past, ones certainly irrelevant to the late 20th century.

Our sense of a vital, morally sound American culture can be restored, I think, only by first recovering conscious bonds to our mother Civilization. Since Western Civilization may be dying in Europe, it is vital that we preserve it here. As one step in that process of intellectual reconstruction, the Latin, Orthodox, and Jewish traditions need for the first time to be wholly integrated into the American cultural equation. Moreover, while all races and all external customs should be welcomed and celebrated as part of our visible pluralism, we must *insist* on broad exposure to and respect for the values and meanings of the Western tradition which gave birth to this land. On that basis, then, can rest a cultural order focused on family, faith, and property as the guarantors of our liberty and opportunities for happiness.

Can public education take part in these tasks? Given its present condition, it's unlikely that it can since it now denies any authentic cultural purposes. The burgeoning number of nonpublic schools suggests that many American parents are today unconsciously heeding Aristotle's advice in his *Ethics* to compensate for the public neglect of virtue by promoting "goodness" in one's family and friends. Such a turn in no way provides a resolution to our cultural dilemma, and may for a time accentuate our differences. Yet with public education's abdication of "public purposes," the turn to "nonpublic" schools may paradoxically be the first and necessary step toward public renewal.

—Allan C. Carlson

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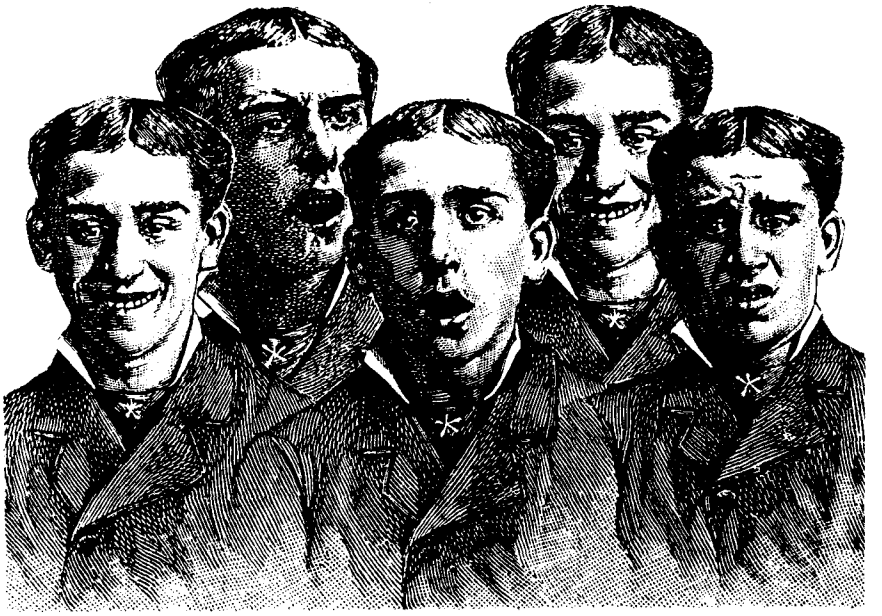
Sharks

George Perry: *The Life of Python;* Little, Brown; Boston.

Three-card monte is a game of chance that's often dealt by those who leave absolutely nothing to chance. To play, the dealer takes three cards, shows their faces to the player, places them face down on the table, then shuffles their position. The player attempts to correctly identify the location of a particular card. A variation on this scheme is the old shell game, a true favorite of con artists. Once, Messrs. John Cleese, Michael Palin, Graham Chapman, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Terry Gilliam worked together in a BBC television program titled *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974) and feature films



including *And Now for Something Completely Different* (1971), *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1974), *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), *Monty Python Live at the Hollywood Bowl* (1982), and *Monty Python's Meaning of Life* (1983). One of their objectives in all of these projects was to expose con men, frauds, and various and sundry affected bigots and beings through the medium of humor, tasteful, tasteless, or otherwise. Those in the know refer to the group of men through a form of shorthand: the "Pythons." But I'd like to suggest that as time has marched on (perhaps to the downbeat of John Philip Sousa's *Liberty Bell)* they have become the "Montes." The apotheosis of the Montes comes in George Perry's *The Life of Python* which, in addition to being a heavily illustrated panegryic, is a semiauthorized biography ("Although it is by no means official, authorized Python work," Perry notes, "each member went out of his way to be helpful." He then expresses his deep gratitude to them for providing time and heretofore unpublished personal memorabilia). The book is precisely the sort of thing that the Pythons would be apt to parody; it is a text that one would expect to find in *16* or other teeny-bopper fanzines: details about the boys' Mums and Pops, personal interest and hobbies, where they live. All that's lacking is a checklist with items listing favorite foods, colors, and pop groups—though this last item is implicitly answered.

In *The Meaning of Life* there is a sketch including one "Mr. Creosote," an extraordinarily fat man who copiously vomits while supping in a rather regal dining establishment and who finally explodes, showering the scene with his waste. One passage in the book, from Monte financial and spiritual supporter and ex-Beatle, George Harrison (ever notice how George is always described as an "ex-Beatle" while Paul and Ringo, to varying degrees, are their own men and John is simply a martyr?), may have been the emetic used to provoke Mr. Creosote:

> There are certain things in life which make life worth living, and one of those things is Python. Especially to someone like me. When you've gone through so much in life, and you're supposed to decide what is real and what isn't, you watch the television and you see all this madness going on, and everyone is being serious and accepting it, and you're ready to bang your head on the wall in despair—then someone says "And now for something completely different!" That saves the day.

Life must be trying for poor George; no wonder he was never accused of being "the smart Beatle." Pity, too, all of those who will be taken by Perry's game of six-man Monte at their local bookseller. (SM) □

A Big Bonbon

***Romancing the Stone;* Directed by Robert Zemeckis; Written by Diane Thomas; Twentieth-Century Fox.**

Romancing the Stone is a cinematic Raisenette: sweet, chewy, and individually unsatisfying. It is, in design and execution, sort of a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* for that segment of *The Big Chill* generation that likes to think itself above such "childish amusements" (though that assessment is made only in public after a furtive viewing of Indiana Jones's exploits). The characters in *Romancing the Stone* are grown-ups but not adults:

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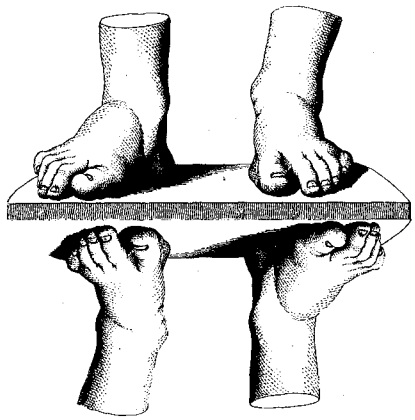
key are a romance novelist who looks not like Barbara Cartland but like a Cartland creation and a swaggering vagabond whose most painful moment comes when he discovers, in a crumbling issue of *Rolling Stone,* that the Doobie Brothers have disbanded. Essentially, the movie is nothing more than a pulp romance brought to the screen, but those who produced it, apparently, like to think themselves to be more arch: that is, in terms of current literary discourse the movie is a self-conscious romance. Somehow, it's implied, by calling attention to its recognition that it *is* a $2.95 story line, it makes itself more serious and important. One of the favorite activities of the literary analysts of the generation in question is to examine works of so-called "popular culture" and to make all sorts of grand, sanctimonious announcements about them. Some of these demischolars have accidentally bumped into Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* or some of Barthes's "mythologies," and have consequently worked toward making the banal profound. The results are publication and tenure. Given that *Romancing the Stone* has a "frame" and a number of the "elements" of the popular romance genre, it will undoubtedly take on an outsize mantle of respectability. (SM) □

Shaking a Money-Maker

***Footloose;* Directed by Herbert Ross; Written by Dern Pitchford; Paramount.**

Break dancers—those young people who go writhing, flipping, and spinning about like modern, urban, secular dervishes—probably do not think about sex once they've completed their bouts. Rather, they undoubtedly wonder whether there's a chiropractor in the house. Television's *Dance Fever* structurally emphasizes sex through the use of the over-endowed women who attend the host, but it's obvious that the boys and girls who are up on the stage shaking it for all they're worth have money and prizes on

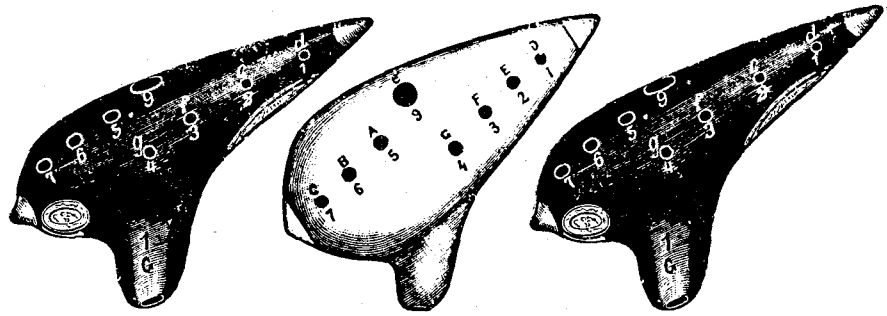


their minds—be what they may. A brisk foxtrot, I imagine, would be more libido-stirring than anything done on *American Bandstand. Footloose* is based on the foolish premise that dancing leads straight to if not bed, then at least to a car's backseat. Naturally, "uptight" adults are the ones who think this is so, so they've outlawed the practice. Filmic teens, who have always known better than their elders—or at least have in the post-Andy Hardy period—oppose them. Predictably, those who feel themselves "born to boogie" conquer. What is more annoying than the moronic movie itself is the likelihood that the "grown ups" who made *Footloose* spent a great deal of cash on consultants, testing, marketing, etc. in order to tailor the product to be properly simplistic. The teens who see *Footloose* and who side with the kids against the aged powers that be undoubtedly can't imagine that they are being treated in a more ridiculous manner by Hollywood than the restrained dancers are by those in charge. The only "footloose" action that director Ross and writer Pitchford are genuinely concerned with is their own on the way to the bank. (SM) □

MUSIC

Post-Modern Muzak

One of the deleterious aspects of enclosed shopping malls is the audible environment—not the sounds of shoppers shouting, scuffling, and struggling about, around, and over imaginary bargains, but the ever-pervasive schmaltz that fills the air. There are the



standard packaged long-playing tapes that the large department stores utilize; the always-too-loud FM radio that teen-oriented boutiques play; and, of course, the supposedly soothing sounds of *Spanish Eyes, Tie a Yellow Ribbon,* or something by Barry Manilow that ooze from organ stores. The last-named is, perhaps, the most annoying, as it is the result, in many cases, of thrown switches that provide everything from snare drums to a chamber orchestra. The pitch is that anyone with several hundred dollars and the requirement for a new piece of living room furniture can make

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sounds worthy of a junior high school auditorium by simply following the colored keys, numbers, or now, thanks to silicon spinoffs, alphanumerics.

Trevor Horn is best known for his production work with Foreigner and on Yes's first big seller in over a decade, *90125* (Atco). Yes once sounded like a group of modern baroque musicians who were stranded in Morocco; Horn has sanitized the group's sound so that it now brings Kennedy Space Center, not some backstreet bazaar, to mind. Apparently, Horn felt some digital urges while in the midst of *90125*, so he put together what is possibly a group of androids known as Art of Noise and created a short album titled *Into the Battle with the Art of Noise* (Island Records). Which brings us back to the shopping malls. The Horn concoction could serve in any of the three before-mentioned settings; the cuts are often mellifluous and regularly with-it: fine china and bib overalls could both be bought to the beat. The pervasive electronic temper is such that the Art of Noise sounds like it consists of a group of organ salesmen who found themselves with an overabundance of time on their hands.

Meanwhile, there's Thomas Dolby, the man whose *The Golden Age of Wireless* (Capitol) established him as the synth-kid of sophisticated dance music. The reaction to his recently released *The Flat Earth* (Capitol) has been amusing, as the bulk of record reviewers try to come to grips with the concept that Dolby's talent may be more than a knack with tape recorders and electrical outlets. After all, *The Flat Earth* features air-powered trumpets and trombones, and electronics give way to acoustics (as he sings on the title track, "don't you point that raygun at me"). There are honest-to-gosh nuances on the album, which just might make it one of the most consequential releases of this year in the nebulous pop-rock-new-music genre. (SM) □

ART

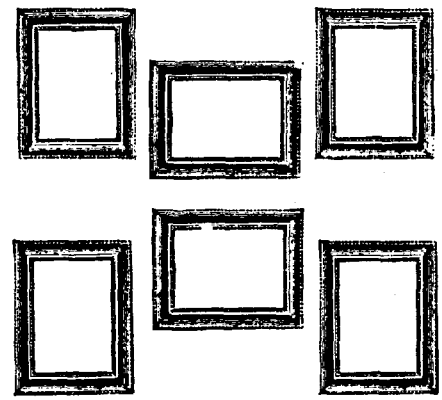
Time Warps

by Peter Fripp

In the words of a 19th-century British nursery rhyme:

If wishes were Horses,
Beggars would ride;
If turnips were watches,
I would wear one by my side.

There is, it seems, a fairly influential group of rather strange persons out there who are wearing turnips and telling time; what's unfortunate is that these persons, many of whom are designated "performance artists," are not being taken as dreamers and/or moon-struck lunatics, but as bona fide enhancers of what was once popularly known as "Western Civilization." The past tense is brought into play here because it's unimaginable that the activities that



these artists are involved in can in any way, shape, or form be construed as things done by human beings who have passed beyond that point in time called the neolithic period—and it may be a libel on our ancestors to yoke them with these contemporary life forms. Art, of course, is always paranormal: those works that can be figured "art" partake of something that is beyond the quotidian or ordinary. Consequently, artists in some ancient societies were considered to be divine madmen, seers into another dimension who were capable of bringing the sights or sounds from the outlying sphere back into the ordinary world. Obviously, anyone with that sort of reach was special. In time, however, the idea of the artist as an illuminated madman was replaced by that of the artist as outsider, or prophet. This has been the general scheme in the West since the advent of the Romantic period. Outsider status notwithstanding, successful artists were often—for varying durations, the parameters of which were dependent on moods—hugged to the bosom of the society which they *seemed* to be in opposition to. They were feted, lionized, and otherwise rewarded for, ultimately, bringing out some of the finer aspects of what it is to be a human. Naturally, some artists, those who celebrated man with what were perceived as less palatable manners, retained more pure prophet status; these remained in garrets and workshops or left their homelands (possibly, just possibly, to be acknowledged there—or at home, once the domestics realized what they had lost). Art, with its uncanny ability to endure through time and space, would finally tend to emerge, even in cases when the makers were long passed. Commentators then elegiacally note that the artist in question was "ahead of his time," a concept that is really more bizarre than any of the artworks: a person can only be in and of the particular time that he is on this planet; otherwise, he wouldn't be that person—or this wouldn't be this planet.

In this era, the time of the outsider is no more. That is, thanks to/unfortunately because of (which side of the virgule you select indicates your ideological prefer-

Mr. Fripp is a technical journalist from Detroit.

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ence) a pervasive belief that pluralism is *It,* a truly giant achievement of late 20th-century man, there can no longer be any outsiders at large in our society. That may seem to be a rather comprehensive and therefore heady statement, but the backing evidence is as painful as it is obvious. Consider, for example, the case of those persons with communicable diseases. Once upon a time they were

held off not merely at arm's length, but were placed in quarantine. One of the most widespread, well known, virulent diseases about today is AIDS. Initially, people reacted strongly—and in some cases overreacted—to the merest hint of AIDS. But even before the virus behind it was isolated and announced (and it was repeatedly stated that a cure is still years away), reports emerged from San Francisco and other locations that indicated that pre-AIDS lifestyles weren't simply being returned to, but embraced with a vengeance. Drug abuse is another form of disease. In an earlier time, addicts were isolated from or kept at the margins of society; now, statistics indicate that those who don't partake of a narcotic in one form or another are more rare than those who do. Because of this status quo, the "artist" who is more concerned with cutting a figure than with creating genuine art finds himself in a very difficult position since there now seems to be no clearly drawn line that one can be beyond. Still, there are those who push beyond even imaginary boundaries and, what is more pathetic/disgusting, a modern, with-it claque that feels that it's its duty not to praise the finer endeavors of creative man (an ancient, conventional task), but to celebrate the weird: "Let a thousand turnips tick!"

Consider the activities of one Chris Burden, a man whose "work" (along with that of Vito Hannibal Acconci, Laurie Anderson, and Nam June Paik) is central to *The Art of Performance: A*

Critical Anthology, edited by Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (E. P. Dutton; New York), a collection that is in no way critical of the so-called art, but which brings together shivers of excitement and shouts of praise. One of Burden's works is *Five-Day Locker Piece,* which was executed at the University of California-Irvine during a five-day period in April 1971. Burden had himself locked into a 2 x 2 x 3-foot locker during that time. Later that year, in a gallery, Burden did *Prelude to 220, or 110;* it was preceded by *Shout Piece,* during which he shouted obscenities at gallery patrons. About *Prelude to 220,* Burden said, "I was strapped to the floor with copper bands bolted into the concrete. Two buckets of water with 110 [volt] lines submerged in them were placed near me." He added, "People were angry with me for the *Shout Piece,* so in *110* I presented them with an opportunity in a sacrificial situation." Not only did no one—accidentally or otherwise—cause Burden to be electrocuted, but three others joined him for *220,* during which they opened themselves up to death by electrified water. Other pieces had Burden shoving live wires into his chest (a short circuit saved him), dragging himself, while semi-nude, across 50-feet of broken glass, and having his body used for target practice.

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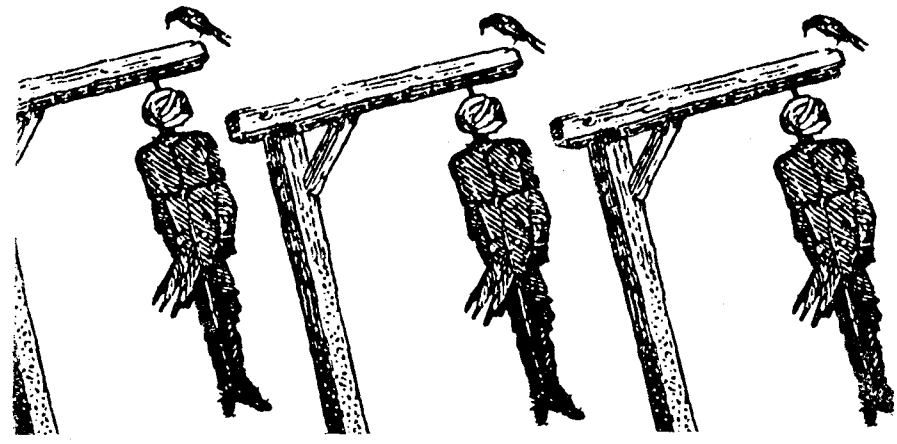
Vito Acconci is similarly "artistic," though less electric. In *Security Zone* (1971), for example, he walked around on a pier in New York; he was blindfolded and, he said, accompanied by "someone about whom my feelings are ambiguous, someone I don't fully trust." Acconci didn't drown. Had he, the world of art (?) would have been spared *Seedbed* (1972), during which Acconci, secreted inside a hollow ramp in a gallery, performed onanism; an amplification system ensured that all those in the vicinity were aware of his activities. A recent report has it that Acconci telephoned the *New York Times* on a fairly regular basis in order to announce that his breathing is a work of art. In an essay on Acconci in *The Art of Performance* David Bourdon writes, "People who are not *au courant* with recent developments in contemporary art might think Acconci belongs in a padded cell." Even those who *are* au courant might—and should—come to the same conclusion; he seems to be a type of madman sans divinity.

It might be concluded that the effects of those like Burden and Acconci are limited to a few members of a fringe group and to that group's supporters in publishing houses and galleries. If only that were the case. Throughout *The Art of Performance* the name "Laurie Anderson" is uttered as if it has ritual power; she, a woman who seems—given her



appearance and announcements—to start off the day by placing her head in a Cuisinart, is the great white hope of the performance art crowd. Their hope has paid off—for Anderson, anyway. Anderson, who is a musician (to use the term *very* loosely), recently put out an album titled *Mister Heartbreak* (Warner Brothers), on which she is accompanied by a number of persons, including that unmusical, aged favorite of the American potty-minded avant-garde, William S. Burroughs. Anderson, who could probably not survive if she didn't have access to an electric outlet (for normal, not Burdenesque, purposes), diodes, amplifiers, and various pieces of silicon technology, talks over music that has jungle rhythms, music that wouldn't be out of place on the soundtrack of something like *Abbott and Costello Go to Africa.* Nonetheless, at the time of this writing, the latter part of April, *Mister Heartbreak* is one of the top five albums on college campuses in the U.S.

Admittedly, Laurie Anderson's success may be considered somewhat inconclusive as far as the pervasiveness of performance art is concerned. After all, big companies like Warner Brothers Records Inc., a Warner Communications Company, regularly pander to low and numb tastes. Moreover, college-attending individuals (sometimes—but not always—known as "students") are barometers, in many cases, of nothing but the degree of adolescence retained by those who have physiologically passed out of that stage. Is there more widespread evidence of the influence of performance artists? Unfortunately, the answer is yes.

The efforts of artist (ah-hem) Nam June Paik in collaboration with musician Charlotte Moorman merit a chapter in

Notables

Construction Notes

Given simply the title of J. M. Coetzee's most recent novel, *Life & Times of Michael K* (Viking Press; New York), it is clear that this is an adventure in Kafka-land, which literary land developers (novelists, critics, and those taking classes that will qualify them to peddle space) have been clearing, bulldozing, excavating, and building upon for years. Now there is a veritable forest of upscale condominiums on the unreal estate, all of which are both different yet the same. Anyone who had a bit too much to drink might try to get through the wrong door—yet it probably wouldn't make a great deal of difference if admission was gained: it would be interpreted as being *Profound.*

This time, there's an additional touch to the decor, as evidenced by the *Life & Times* portion of the title: a bit of 18th-century architectural flourishes are tacked on, such as a petty, bound picaro. However, the interior is done by the firm that has draped the entire development: the august firm Angst & Ennui. Coetzee's novel is built with modern materials: pasteboard instead of plaster; pressboard in lieu of pine. On the surface, there is a pleasant appearance (at least with regard to the surrounding edifices), but one couldn't live there too long before he noticed that the taps leak and that the hinges are undone. Indeed, the entire structure is not unlike one of those imposing homes in California—built on the edge of a cliff. □

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Fleeting Truths

"Musician" Joe Strummer of the British band the Clash recently told the Detroit *Free Press:*

> *The guitar is the most machine I can understand; it has two knobs and a switch.*

The Art of Performance; Moorman's execution of Paik's *Opera Sextronque* (1967) is the main topic. Apparently, Moorman played a cello on a stage in New York while wearing nothing above her waist. Consequently, she was arrested, tried, and found guilty of performing a publicly indecent act—which shows how much New York has changed in less than 20 years, if nothing else. Paik, who is described as a "video artist" in a description written pre-MTV, was undoubtedly taking the show down through electro-optical means. Paik himself is no performing slouch. In 1981 he performed his *Life's Ambition Realized,* which had him playing honky-tonk piano for a strip-tease act. There are, no doubt, bleary-eyed vets of numerous burlesque houses who would be delighted to discover that what they once did in the smoky, filthy, dank halls was really "art." Currently, Paik's work appears in prime time on CBS. Anyone who tuned in to see Charles Kuralt—a man who seems as dangerous as milk—on *The American Parade* last season saw him on a set that was designed with the assistance of Paik. When the credits rolled at the end of the show, there was Paik's name modified by "Design Consultant." No backstreet galleries for Paik. Given this, would it be hard to imagine Burden as "special assignment editor" for *That's Incredible,* Acconci as a regular on a *Beat the Clock*-type show, or Anderson as a hostess on a variety hour? If such things are possible—and it seems that they are—then the hands on our turnips should tell us that it will soon be too late for sanity. □

JOURNALISM

A Siskel—of Sorts

Lest it seem that we pay undue attention to the *Chicago Tribune's* man in the aisle seat and not enough to his *Sun-Times* competitor and *At the Movies* cohort, Roger Ebert, we would like to make amends by providing an example of Mr. Ebert's deep erudition. Here is *Under the Volcano* as described by the movie maven:

> the classic novel about a day in the life of a British drunk in Mexico . . . the lifetime opus of novelist Malcolm Lowry, who did decades of research in fleshpots and watering holes south of the border.

The *National Inquirer* would be proud of such copy, wouldn't it? We wonder what position Chicago would maintain if it were rated on the basis of the mental level of its movie reviewers instead of its population count? 2008th? □

In the Mail

***Nuclear Strategy and Strategic Planning* by Colin S. Gray; Foreign Policy Research Institute; Philadelphia, PA.** Unlike other books with similar titles, this one is written by a man who knows something.

***Out of Justice, Peace: Joint Pastoral Letter of the West German Bishops, and Winning the Peace: Joint Pastoral Letter of the French Bishops* edited by James V. Schall; Ignatius Press; San Francisco.** The documents more often talked about than read.

***Instant Appetizers for Malnourished Minds* by Welles Irwin Price; PIP; Winter Haven, FL.** The author doesn't include "Self-indulgence" in this book of quip definitions.

***Center Journal, Volume 3, Number 1* edited by Kerry J. Koller; Center for Christian Studies; Notre Dame; IN.** An issue devoted to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response.*

***Works of Fisher Ames, Volumes I and II* edited by W. B. Allen; Liberty Press; Indianapolis, IN.** An 18th-century man of polemics of the Federalist variety.

***Putting Dell on the Map: A History of the Dell Paperbacks* by William H. Lyles; Greenwood Press; Westport, CT.** Explains how Racine, Wisconsin, was once a hotbed of publishing.

***Shannon's Way* by A. J. Cronin; Little, Brown; Boston.** The most appealing thing about Cronin's medical protagonists is that they are human: likable, yet begging for a punch in the nose.

***The Keys of the Kingdom* by A. J. Cronin; Little, Brown; Boston.** Some 40 years before *Masterpiece Theater* got to *The Citadel,* Hollywood picked up on this Cronin novel about a missionary, not a medical man.

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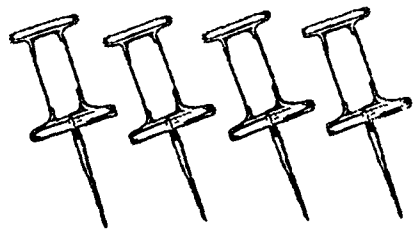
The American Proscenium

Memorial Day 1984

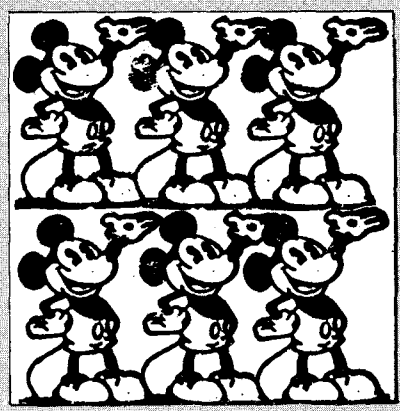
Bertolt Brecht, the cultural left's most astute perceiver of poignant ironies embedded in social injustices, never commanded our rapt allegiance, yet we wouldn't mind listening to what he might have said about the Memorial Day spectacle. Watching it, we thought we could have appreciated, at *that* particular moment, some of his biting existential sarcasm, always directed at the bourgeois democratic arrangement, a sarcasm that would have been oddly appropriate for evaluating *that* particularly perturbing mockery of probities and rectitudes. Here was the glittering pompously solemn parade to honor the Vietnam War veterans, all military glamour at hand, with flags, artillery salutes, and an emotionally aroused President, and, at the end of the cortege, we could see a limping ragtag band of veterans in tattered fatigues and blue jeans. Some in wheelchairs, most of them teary-eyed but fiercely devoted to their past, to what they did. All of them seemingly aware of what they received in return for their blood, sweat, and wounds from the nation they represented in one of its most important trials. Never before was it so clear to us, the TV-watchers, that what they did receive and were paid for their highest sacrifice were humiliation, contempt, injustice, and blind cowardice from a society which had been stultified by modish "humanitarians."



Who is to be blamed that those who offered themselves for something larger than selfhood have been spurned and insulted by those they defended in the fetid jungles half the world away from home? Is there anybody guilty in this land for the most repulsive ideological scam in this nation's history? Where are all those who enriched themselves with fame, money, and stature by spitting upon those who did not hesitate to combat—even if unsuccessfully—evil? Yes, evil, now in hindsight so clearly visible as evil, but what over the years has been portrayed by the modern war profiteers in journalism, academia, publishing, TV, the movies as the noble moral spirit of little people in black pajamas, allegedly better than ourselves. Villainy rewarded with riches is nothing new in human experience, but was it ever so glaringly visible? The man who commented on the hobbling veterans from the CBS News' anchor chair, and who himself had mightily contributed to the fact that those who had been killed and tortured were thereafter forgotten and rejected, looked at us—on that Memorial Day—with fake, hypocritical uninvolvement in his eyes, allowing the cameras to reveal for only a moment that those who fought for us are still offering no apology for what they did. But wouldn't it be fair to know what murky linkage exists between his smug certitude that he had contributed to terminate an "immoral" war, his current close-to-a-million dollar salary, and *their* ordeal, torment, and oblivion? The fortunes made by those who saw the halo of sanctity in Hanoi are now discreetly consumed in Martha's Vineyard and Hollywood, and none of the brahmins or celebs seem to feel the slightest pang of remorse for how those who shielded their right to be repulsively demented look and feel now. Men and women who prohibited those soldiers from winning, robbed them of their dignity, and orchestrated national repudiation of their spilled guts and mental anguish, who worshiped the soldiers' slayers and torturers, and therefore made the entire world an easier object for the communist takeover are *now* consuming the lucre for their skulduggery in the glowing spotlights of perverse "professional" accolades. And even now they have not enough sense of shame to lower their eyes when they stare at us from our TV screens before announcing a few repugnant platitudes about those whom they have so obviously wronged. □

Liberal Culture

Ethics & the Mystery of Meals



In *Playboy,* our time's Vulgate of the congregation of the unwashed, we read a month's sermon by one Exene, a female rock particle:

> I don't believe in anything that's morally right. My friend the poet Lydia Lunch said she believes in beauty, truth and filth. That about says it all.

Our friend, Suzy Snack, a painter, told us that she's familiar with poet Lunch's theories. She's busy with searching for the visual synthesis of beauty, truth, and human secretions on canvas. She hopes *Playboy* will publish her findings. □

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A Prudent Progressive

Leopold Tyrmand

The world is in its present condition (and many suspect that this state is much worse than before, even if "before" may mean only in our own individual memory) because of ideas. Three of those ideas can be credited to three historical figures: Rousseau, Marx, and Freud.

Marx came to the conclusion that human economic activities could be stimulated and administered by instincts other than that of acquiring of property. The result of his idea is the most ruthless political and social system ever known to man, one which extorts production and assures distribution of goods with the help of the police.

Freud, as his countless interpreters would lead us to believe, declared that all of the world's ills originated within man's inner chambers of consciousness, and that paramount importance rests not in what we think and feel is right or wrong, but in what we desire or abhor, particularly when those feelings are evoked by those related to us by blood or bed. Thus, Freudians maintain, in order to make life better, we should concentrate on this aspect of our being.

Finally, what we today call liberal ideas about freedom, authority, human nature, goodness, human rights, and civil duties have come to us wrapped in a package from Rousseau, who proclaimed that society is the source of our fate. He thus advised social alterations—now the object of something called social engineering—which he thought would eventually solve all problems related to destiny. At the same time, he extolled the release of natural impulses as being the purest fountain of humanity. He was never able, however, to explain why his social manipulation did not interfere with God-given naturalness. Freud came to his rescue by claiming that simply getting those impulses into the open would make everything easier and more propitious for both man and society. Therefore, if we page through *Hustler* magazine, or if we hear someone burp at the dinner table, and both *Hustler* and burping are extolled as progress and liberation, then we are witnessing the ultimate triumph of Rousseau's ideas.

The contemporary American has little trouble in dealing with the first two conditioners of his mind and culture. Marxism, as realized in the so-called socialist societies and economies, has proven to be such a failure that it cannot be reasonably accepted as either an idea or a proposition: a vacation trip to the Soviet Union or Cuba suffices to nullify any dialectical dilemma. The Freudian legacy has drowned in the infinite sea of triteness and caricature: at a time when learned psychotherapists announce on TV talk shows that some people are criminals because they are moved by more violent propensities than other people, and proclaim such finding as *their* epochal discovery, any serious dialogue between "advanced" psychology and modern intelligence is destined to stop. A strong suspicion lingers that after tons of books, endless university courses, and suffocating loads of psychoanalytical revelations, mankind knows nothing more or better than it had known before the psychoanalysts, who hawk arrogance as compassion, began to hover over Western couches covered by prostrated bodies. Some new vocables have been added to the intellectual slang of the epoch—which is about all that mankind has gained from its recent era of idolizing psychological banality.

The liberal post-Rousseauism is a more complex and difficult-to-deal-with legacy. Our common sense of freedom and equality is contaminated by it. Our notions of love, propriety, rectitude, and decency still suffer more from its perennially immature obfuscations than from any other cultural or social attempts to define our lives and our moral norms. We all feel that "free" impulses, unleashed by liberal, post-Rousseauesque principles of naturalness have transformed our social habitat into a lethal jungle which now requires some emergency measures in order to merely preserve a valid definition of social bond and legal equilibrium. Even if we do not know it for sure, we all feel oppressed by an intimation that a catastrophe looms on the horizon, unavoidable if we do not revise some rudiments of our thinking—those rudiments proclaimed as nonnegotiable by Rousseau's spiritual heirs. It seems that the generation which now enters the American political scene has no choice but to reconsider several truths about Western civilization which heretofore were thought to have been cozily stored away in the attic. □

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